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Indians in Roman Berenike

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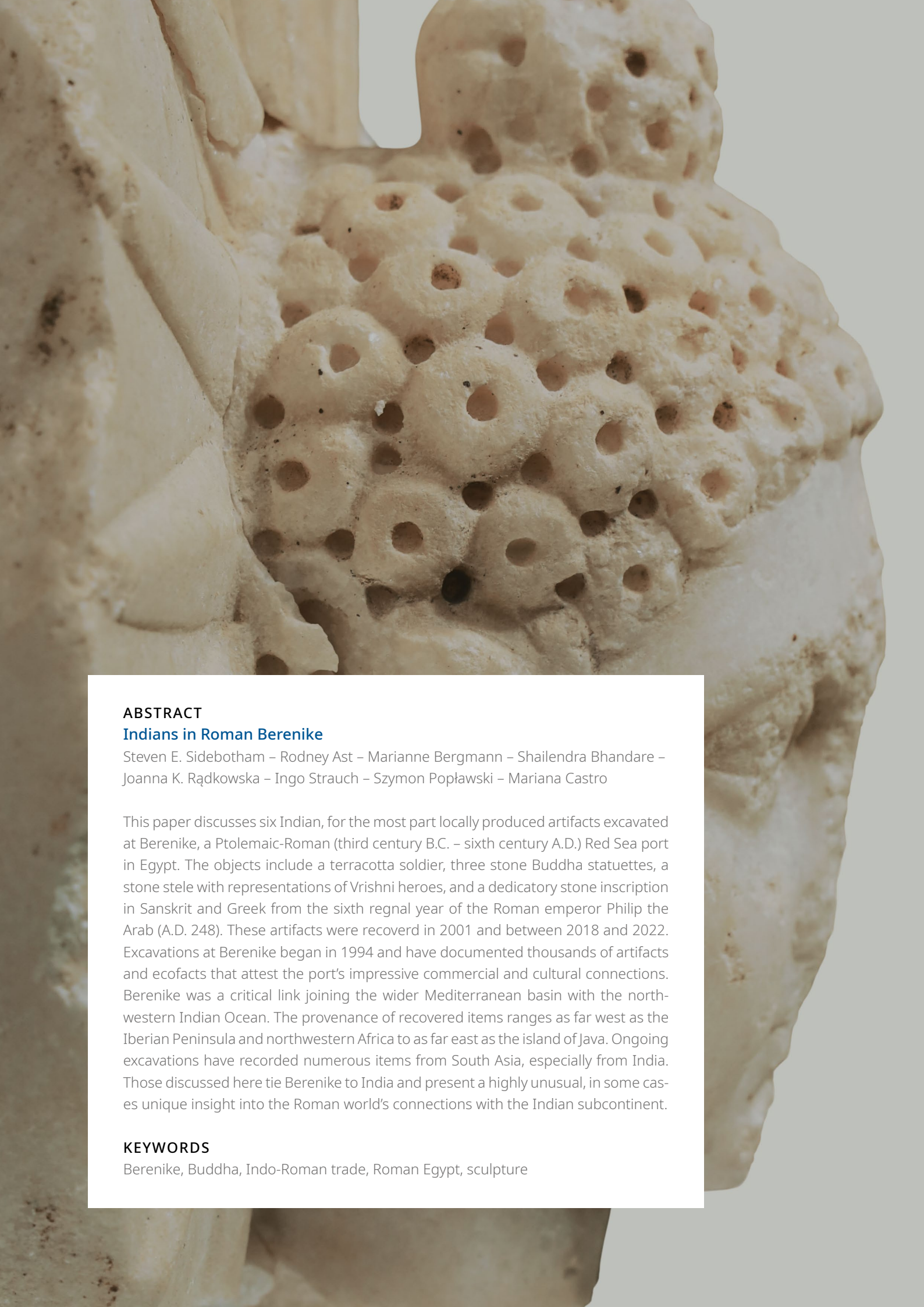

ABSTRACT

Indians in Roman Berenike

Steven E. Sidebotham – Rodney Ast – Marianne Bergmann – Shailendra Bhandare – Joanna K. Rądkowska – Ingo Strauch – Szymon Popławski – Mariana Castro

This paper discusses six Indian, for the most part locally produced artifacts excavated at Berenike, a Ptolemaic-Roman (third century B.C. – sixth century A.D.) Red Sea port in Egypt. The objects include a terracotta soldier, three stone Buddha statuettes, a stone stele with representations of Vrishni heroes, and a dedicatory stone inscription in Sanskrit and Greek from the sixth regnal year of the Roman emperor Philip the Arab (A.D. 248). These artifacts were recoverd in 2001 and between 2018 and 2022. Excavations at Berenike began in 1994 and have documented thousands of artifacts and ecofacts that attest the port's impressive commercial and cultural connections. Berenike was a critical link joining the wider Mediterranean basin with the northwestern Indian Ocean. The provenance of recovered items ranges as far west as the Iberian Peninsula and northwestern Africa to as far east as the island of Java. Ongoing excavations have recorded numerous items from South Asia, especially from India. Those discussed here tie Berenike to India and present a highly unusual, in some cases unique insight into the Roman world's connections with the Indian subcontinent.

KEYWORDS

Berenike, Buddha, Indo-Roman trade, Roman Egypt, sculpture

STEVEN E. SIDEBOTHAM – RODNEY AST – MARIANNE BERGMANN – SHAILENDRA BHANDARE – JOANNA K. RĄDKOWSKA – INGO STRAUCH – SZYMON POPŁAWSKI – MARIANA CASTRO

Indians in Roman Berenike

Introduction

1 Excavations at the third century B.C. – sixth century A.D. port of Berenike on the Red Sea coast of Egypt began in 1994 and are on-going (Fig. 1.). This study focuses on six artifacts documented there in 2001, 2018, 2019 and 2022 that were inspired by Indian art and epigraphy. Steven E. Sidebotham and Rodney Ast are responsible for the introduction and conclusion, and editorial oversight of the entire article. Contributors to individual sections are named, in alphabetical order, at the beginning of their respective parts. Szymon Popławski created many of the illustrations and reconstructions, and, in the case of the marble Buddha figure, in collaboration with Mariana Castro. Contributions by Martina Stoye, who was unable to participate in writing the article, derive from her part of a presentation of the material in Oxford in 2022[1].

2 To enhance readability for non-specialists, Indian (Sanskrit) words and toponyms are generally given in simplified form. The only exceptions are specific Sanskrit terms or names, where such a simplified form would appear rather awkward or even misleading.

3 Berenike lies approximately 825 km south-southeast of Suez and about 260 km east of Aswan on the Red Sea. Founded in the second quarter of the third century B.C. by Ptolemy II, the Roman-period settlement was, with Myos Hormos (Quseir al-Qadim), one of the two major Red Sea ports through which seaborne trade between India, Africa and the Mediterranean flowed, transporting a range of merchandise, from the quotidian to the more expensive. Thus, the primary purpose of Berenike was its role as a harbor for maritime trade. The peak of its commercial activities was the first and second centuries A.D., with a resurgence around the middle of the fourth century and extending into the fifth. Although Berenike was previously thought to be in sharp decline in the third century A.D., growing epigraphic evidence indicates activity throughout its history and the mid-third century A.D. Sanskrit inscription presented below further supports this. During the fifth century, the port declined in importance and was finally abandoned sometime prior to the mid-sixth century A.D.

1 See Stoye 2022. *Verbatim* citations of M. Stoye's presentation are preserved in quotation marks.

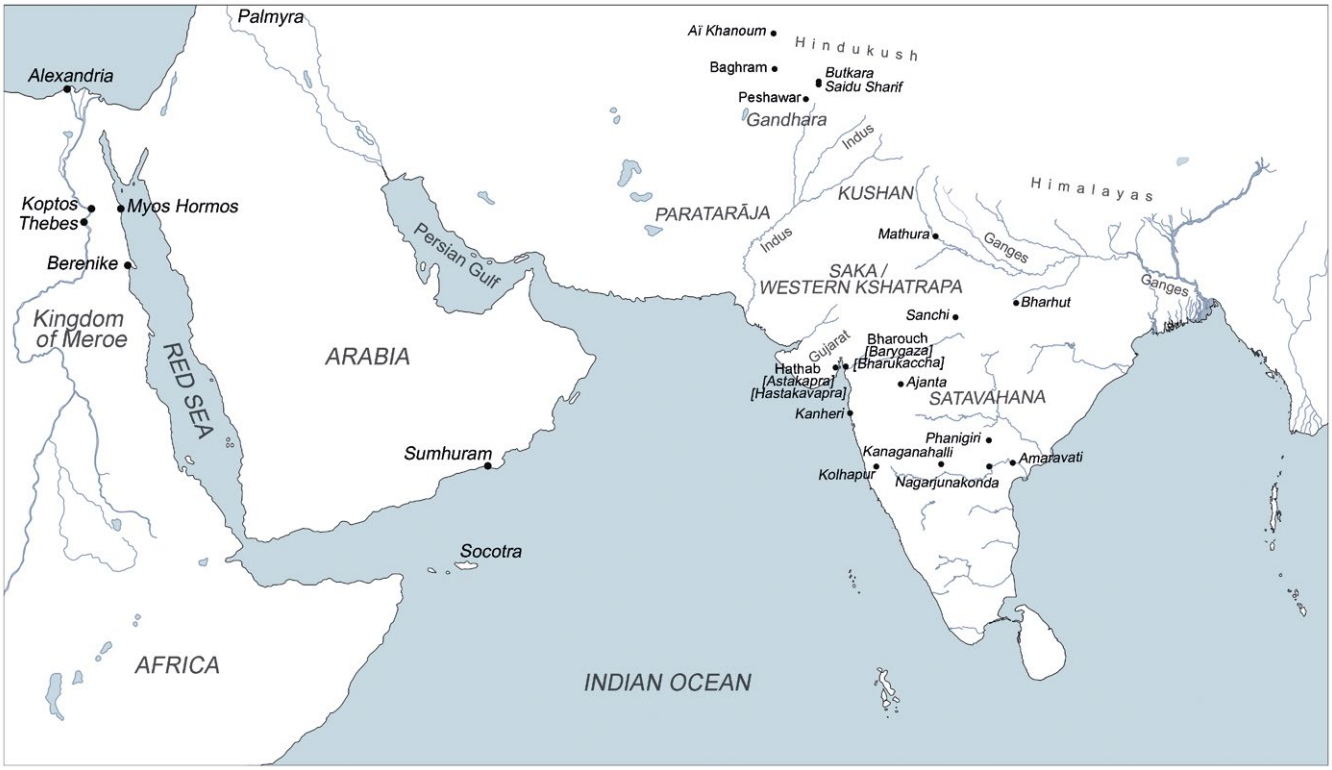

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Fig. 1: The northwestern Indian Ocean

4 Over the course of approximately 800 years, Berenike was home to numerous groups of men, women, children and their household companion animals. The documentation of at least a dozen different written languages (European, African, Middle Eastern and South Asian), the identification of numerous centers of religious activity, varied burial customs, an array of comestibles plus imports from throughout the ancient world extending from the Iberian Peninsula and northwestern Africa to Java and into more southerly reaches of the Nile Valley and the Indian Ocean coast of Africa contribute to a picture of a lively, multicultural port[2].

5 Finds from South Asia constitute a notable category of the excavated remains. They comprise pottery (coarse, cooking and fine wares as well as storage and shipment containers), coins, textiles (including fragments of ships' sails), beads, banded agate cameo blanks and gemstones, a jar inscription and other artifacts as well as substantial archaeobotanical remains and some faunal evidence[3]. These finds have indicated that South Asian goods were used at and passed through Berenike. The figurative and inscriptional artifacts from Hindu and Buddhist milieux that we present in this article go one step further[4], demonstrating conclusively that South Asians also resided at least temporarily at Berenike, engaged in religious practices there and pursued artistic expressions that had origins in their homelands. Many of these individuals were undoubtedly engaged in some aspect of the ›international‹ commerce that was Berenike's main raison d'être, but they were settled enough that they, or the artisans who worked for them, used local materials and drew on artistic methods that are actually foreign to South Asia. Thus, the transcultural exchange represented in most of the cases discussed in this article constituted more than just the

2 General information about the site is available in Sidebotham 2011; Sidebotham et al. 2019; Sidebotham et al. 2020; Sidebotham et al. 2021; Sidebotham et al. 2022; Sidebotham et al. 2023; Sidebotham et al. 2024.

3 Sidebotham 2011; cf. Sidebotham – Tomber (forthcoming).

4 Two newly documented Isis dedications from the temple, one in Greek and Tamil, the other in Greek and Ge'ez, provide further epigraphic evidence for contact with India. See Sidebotham et al. 2025 for brief preliminary descriptions of each.

2

Fig. 2: The Indian subcontinent

transposition of artifacts from a home country to a foreign one. Rather, it involved a process of cultural and artistic assimilation and even fusion. This is one reason why the new South Asian finds from Berenike are so important for our understanding not only of maritime trade relations in the Roman empire but also of the cross-cultural sharing of ideas, methods and values that has previously escaped analysis because of the lack of evidence for it.

The Contexts and Findspots

by Marianne Bergmann – Mariana Castro – Steven E. Sidebotham

6 The artifacts presented here comprise one terracotta statuette, the remains of three stone statuettes representing Buddha, one Sanskrit-Greek bilingual stele with a Buddhist dedication and one stele with representations of Vrishni heroes. The six objects

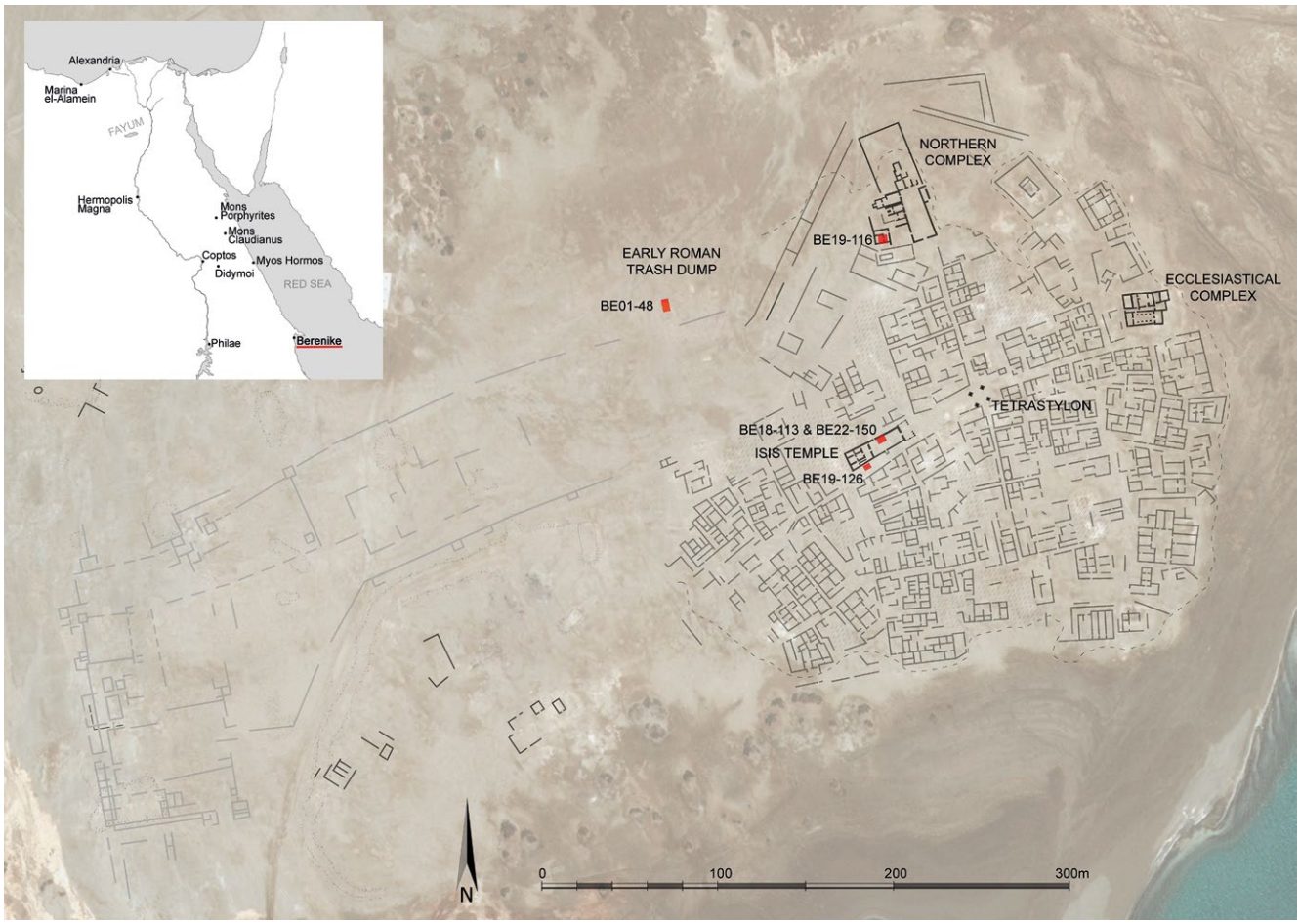

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Fig. 3: Plan of Berenike showing locations of trenches with relevant finds

were excavated in various contexts and were recorded from strata dating from the first to the fourth or fifth centuries. All were clearly inspired by South Asian iconography.

7 There is no way to determine the original context or function of the terracotta fragment representing a warrior[5] that was discovered in 2001 in a first century A.D. trash dump located northwest of the ancient city center (Fig. 3). This artifact, initially identified as a representation of a Roman auxiliary soldier[6], has been reexamined and reattributed with a provenance in India. It may have been the personal property of a South Asian visitor to or resident of Berenike, or a souvenir brought back by someone who traveled to South Asia. It is the only object presented in this study with a likely provenance in the Indian subcontinent.

8 Evidence discussed below suggests that the stone artifacts were all likely made in Berenike itself. The small headless stone statuette of Buddha was found in one of a number of small shrines situated around a large court in an area in the north of the site referred to as the Northern Complex[7]. The shrine included a built altar and contained, in addition to the Buddha-body, an impressive number of dedications, including a small Meroitic head of Amun and a bust of Sarapis. Excavations recorded these in a collapse dating to the fourth century[8], but they may have adorned the chapel earlier.

5 Trench and registry number: BE01-48.*019* Pb41 (2560-T).

6 Sidebotham – Wendrich 2001/2002, 26 f.; Sidebotham et al. 2008, pl. 15, 4; Sidebotham 2011, 76 f. (here Fig. 7).

7 Trench and registry number: BE19-116.*039* Pb 18 (BE19-116/039/001). For information on the complex, see Ast – Rądkowska 2020, 147 (with further bibl.); Sidebotham et al. 2023, 11 f.

8 Trenches BE18/19-116 and BE23-154; see Sidebotham et al. 2019, 11; Sidebotham et al. 2020, 14; Kaper 2021, 64; Sidebotham et al. 2023, 11; for photos of the room and some of the finds, see Sidebotham et al. 2019, pl. 7, 1–8, 1; Sidebotham et al. 2020, pls. 6, 1–8, 2.

9 The two stelai and fragments of two representations of Buddha came to light inside the temple of Isis and in an annex abutting it. The temple, situated at the highest point and approximately in the center of the Roman-era city, was the most prominent and most richly decorated religious sanctuary in Berenike. Built in Egyptian style during the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) by a merchant from Puteoli named Marcus Laelius Cosmus[9], it featured statuary made of wood, stone, and metal, as well as dedicatory inscriptions. The plethora of inscriptional and statuary dedications to Isis, Sarapis and other deities, both Greco-Roman and Egyptian – Aphrodite, Neptune, possibly Artemis, Harpocrates, Osiris – is not surprising. There were also dedications to deities from outside the Mediterranean, including Meroe[10], which reflects the cosmopolitan and eclectic character of the temple and the port. Most artifacts were found in the forecourt, where the large statue bases that still line the interior courtyard walls bear witness today to the ancient practice of adorning public religious space around Egyptian temples with statuary and other kinds of offerings placed on top of inscribed bases.

10 Ceramic evidence and recycled architectural and epigraphic remains from the temple courtyard suggest renovations and occupation (perhaps not for religious purposes) into the fifth and sixth centuries[11]. Accordingly, many of the dedications found in the temple were excavated in late contexts containing collapse. The stone artifacts were not the only finds of Indian inspiration or provenance; excavations also recovered two Satavahana coins of the early to mid-second century A.D. in the extreme southwestern corner of the temple courtyard[12]. Likely, they, too, had been dedications (Fig. 4).

11 A small room, or annex, with walls built of fossilized coral heads[13] and added to the southern exterior side of the Isis temple sometime probably in the fourth century A.D. or later, contained numerous artifacts, including figural remains made of stone, wood and metal, all of which had been tightly packed into a small space measuring approximately 2 × 2 m[14]. This small room, entered by a single narrow door on its southern wall, may have been a repository (*bothros*) for temple offerings from various periods that had been gathered together and transferred here in late antiquity. Whether their removal to this location was the result of space clearing within the temple remains unknown. Equally, these artifacts may have been packed into the small room to preserve them from damage or destruction, although the fragmentary state of preservation of many of the objects might provide contrasting evidence. Whatever the reason, all objects in the room were deposited hurriedly and unceremoniously.

12 One of the sculptures excavated from the annex was a small stone head of Buddha with a topknot. The head was carved in anhydritic gypsum, which is local to Berenike and its environs[15]. The appearance of the eyes and mouth of the Buddha head closely resembles those of other stone heads of more traditional Greco-Roman figures, which indicates that a workshop somewhere in Berenike produced it (Fig. 13)[16].

13 The other object from this small room was the fragmentary upper part of a stele, also made from local anhydritic gypsum, with representations of three anthro-

9 Ast 2021; Sidebotham et al. 2021, 18 f.

10 For a statue of Sebiumeker (from near the Isis temple entrance), see Sidebotham et al. 2020, 16 and Kaper 2021, 57–62; for a statuette of Arensnuphis, see Sidebotham et al. 2020, 16 and Kaper 2021, 62 f.

11 For discussion of the continued use of Isis temple into the fifth century or later, see Sidebotham et al. 2022, 16–26.

12 See below § 26.

13 Trench BE19-126.

14 Sidebotham et al. 2020, 18–22.

15 The stone, which was used at Berenike for buildings, statue bases and most sculpture, came from somewhere in the vicinity including a possible quarry on Ras Banas; see Harrell 2024, 132 f. 365–367. The head has the registry number BE19-126/016/001.

16 Sidebotham et al. 2020, 18.

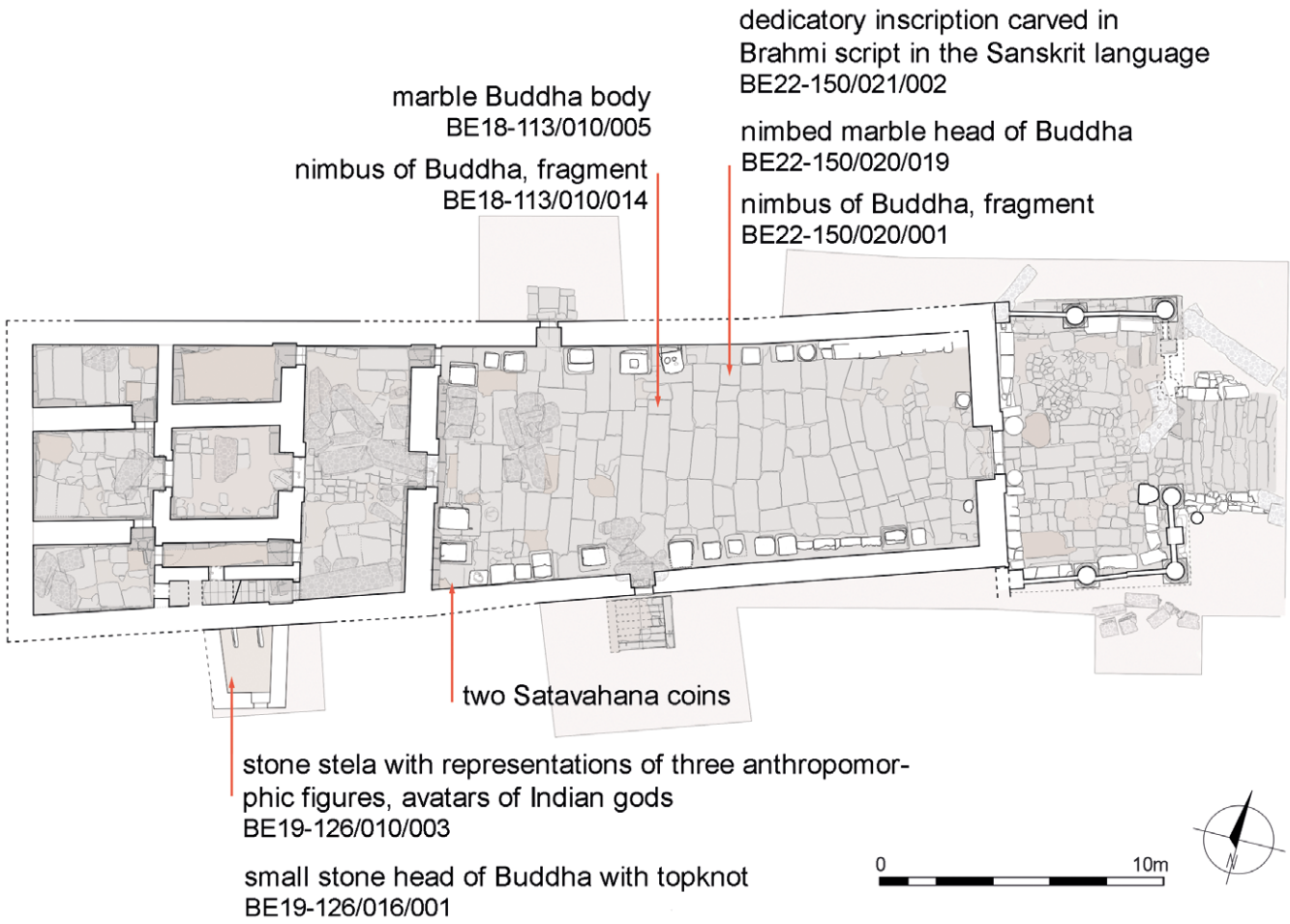

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Fig. 4: Plan of Isis temple with locations of finds

pomorphic figures of Vrishni heroes[17]. Excavations documented it leaning at an angle, right side up, in the extreme northwestern corner of the small room (Fig. 5).

14 The other two Indian-related objects, the marble statuette of Buddha and the stele inscribed in Brahmi-Sanskrit and Greek, were excavated in the northern half of the Isis temple courtyard. The marble Buddha statuette consisted of four fragments: a left half of the headless body including its pedestal, which had broken vertically along a vein in the material, its right side missing; a head with most of the left part of its nimbus; the right part of the nimbus, broken away along the continuing vein in the material; and a small fragment of the top part of the nimbus (Fig. 4. 6)[18].

15 The fragment of the body and the top part of the nimbus came from a dense, thick layer of stone collapse packed with statuary remains above the courtyard floor of the Isis temple[19]. The body fragment was discovered ca. 2 m south of the temple's outer northern wall and ca. 60 cm above floor-level in the collapse in the courtyard. It lay parallel to the edge of the southern border of the trench, which ran east-west. It was situated on its broken right side with its left foot pointing east towards the temple entrance. The excavators did not note the exact location of the nimbus fragment.

16 The two main parts of the head and nimbus appeared in 2022 in a trench containing what was left of collapse layers in the temple courtyard. This included the

17 The stele has the registry number BE19-126/010/003.

18 Body: reg. no. BE18-113/010/005; small upper fragment of nimbus: reg. no.BE18-113/010/014; head and joining large fragment of nimbus: reg. no. BE22-150/021/001.

19 Trench BE18-113.

area partly uncovered in 2018[20], where a large pile of collapsed stones, which sloped down to the south, had remained unexcavated due to time constraints. At the bottom of this pile, under several layers of collapse, were two fragments of the Buddha head excavated near one another on a very thin layer of sand above the paved floor. The main fragment, including the head and the left part of the nimbus, lay face down between two stone blocks, which explains the damage to its face. The right part of the nimbus, which had chipped off along the continuing vein in the material, was right side up beyond the stone block located to the left of the head. Records from 2018 show that the body fragment was excavated ca. 2 m west of the head (Fig. 4. 6).

5

Fig. 5: In situ photo of Vrishni stele. View looking northwest

17 The stele with Buddhist inscription in Brahmi-Sanskrit and Greek[21] was found immediately west of and very close to the fragments of the head. Neither it nor the fragments of the Buddha statuette were in their original collapsed position. This is clear from the fact that the body and the fragments of the head were found far from one another. Also, the body was excavated too far from the pedestals that lined the front of the north wall of the courtyard to have simply fallen from one of them. Whereas it is possible that the head and the right half of its nimbus split apart along the vein in the marble when it fell against a stone, with one part landing face up and the other face down, it seems impossible that the head fell face down and the right half of its nimbus landed not to the right but to the left of it and beyond a big stone. Finally, excavations recorded the rectangular stele, which was oriented east-west and in a diagonal position, with one of its short sides on the courtyard floor. This gave the false impression that it had fallen backwards, being stopped by the substantial stone block on which it had come to lean. Pushed upright, so that the stele stood on the edge that touched the floor, it would have been upside-down with the inscription facing backwards. This makes it clear that the stele reached its final position only by being moved by human hands. And that is probably also true of the other fragments (Fig. 6).

18 Despite all that has been said about the findspots of these objects, it is important that the fragments were still found remarkably close to one another. That makes it almost certain that the inscription was installed near the Buddha statuette and that these were, at least for a period, concurrently displayed in the temple courtyard, although, as will be shown, the inscription was carved more than 100 years later than the marble Buddha. The disarticulation and dispersion of statuary fragments at different levels, not just those of the marble Buddha, seem to indicate that the abandonment of the temple courtyard took place in several phases, perhaps even involving a purposeful destruction of iconic figures.

20 Trench BE18-113.

21 Reg. no. BE22-150/021/002.

6

Fig. 6: Photo montage of find spots of fragments of marble Buddha and Sanskrit inscription in the Isis temple courtyard. View looking west northwest

The Terracotta Warrior

by Joanna K. Rądkowska

19 The fragmentary terracotta representing a soldier preserves the front part of a double-mold figurine (Fig. 7 top). The clay, fine grained with mica inclusions, was unevenly fired and varies from reddish brown (Munsell 2.5 YR 4/4) to brown reddish yellow (7.5 YR 5/6; 6/6). The back preserves imprints of the fingers that pressed the clay into the mold (Fig. 7 middle). The object measures 8,5 cm high × 8,2 cm wide and is only partly preserved. A preliminary report identified it as a Roman auxiliary soldier[22], and this interpretation has since been repeated several times[23]. However, closer analysis leads to a very different interpretation.

20 The figurine is missing its legs and most of both arms and hands. The head is also partly destroyed, but the face is largely extant, though the tip of the nose is slightly chipped. The upper part of the head, together with most of the headgear, likely a flat rimmed helmet, is missing. The left side of the head is more damaged than the right. The upper part of the body, clad in armor, is extant together with part of the upper right arm and nicely preserved small shield held in the left hand, which was either never visible or else hidden behind the shield.

21 The armor has some elements typical of the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. Small indentations in the cuirass may represent scale armor or chain mail. Visible just below the thick girdle is a row of *pteryges*, which also covers portions of the right arm. At the neck is the clasp of a coat or, less likely, a stylized necklace. The oval-shaped shield with an *umbo* is small but massive. The upper rim of the shield preserves a small round

22 Sidebotham – Wendrich 2001/2002, 26 f. This identification was not entirely without merit; for samples of auxiliary warriors, see Fields 2006, who also notes soldiers wearing similar armor on Trajan's column (ca. A.D. 106–113) and the column of Marcus Aurelius (ca. A.D. 193), both in Rome.

23 Sidebotham et al. 2008, pl. 15, 4; Sidebotham 2011, 76 f.

hole, 5 mm in diameter (Fig. 7 bottom), which may have once held a miniature wooden or bronze spear.

22 Most expressive and distinctive is the face of the terracotta, which is round, rather chubby, with large eyes, and clearly defined upper and lower eyelids. The large nose has wide nostrils, and the mouth is small with thick upper and lower lips. The armor, with features indicative of elements of Mediterranean armor processed by South Asian art and tradition, the small shield, the facial features and the clay suggest a South Asian, most likely, a Satavahana origin.

23 Facial features of anthropomorphic figures from the Satavahana cities of Ter (in Maharashtra) and Paithan are very similar to those on the Berenike terracotta. Regardless of gender, they have the same plump cheeks, large, wide-open eyes, and thick lips. This is seen in a terracotta depiction of two Satavahana soldiers from Ter currently in a collection in Ter, Osmanabad, India (Fig. 8). Details of clothing, equipment, accompanying items, etc., are rendered with great care[24]. In addition to Ter and Paithan, the facial depiction on a small terracotta head from Chandankheda (in Maharashtra), also of Satavahana date (mid-first century B.C. – early third century A.D.), is almost identical to the Berenike example[25].

24 The Berenike figurine has never been subjected to laboratory testing. Visually, however, the reddish color and texture suggest that it may be the kaolin clay regularly used to make Satavahana terracottas[26]. As it is now stored in the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities magazine in Quft, laboratory analysis of the fabric is unlikely to occur, and the terracotta's provenance can only be identified based on stylistic features and a basic description of the material. Comparing the figurine from Berenike to examples excavated at the Red Sea port of Myos Hormos, ca. 300 km north of Berenike[27], the differences are obvious, both in repertoire and stylistic features. The Myos Hormos figurines are typical Greco-Roman representations, for example, of Isis-Hathor, heads with Roman hairstyles, etc.[28].

25 Another feature may indicate an Indian origin for the terracotta from Berenike. A tip of the elongated right ear is clearly visible and signifies someone of the *kṣatriya* class[29], which comprised political and military elites. They often wore earrings[30].

7

Fig. 7: Terracotta warrior figurine: top: front – middle: back – bottom: detail with hole for spear

24 Dhavalikar 1977, 51 pls. 40–46.

25 Pardhi et al. 2017, 835, fig. 7 a.

26 Dhavalikar 1977, 30.

27 Thomas 2011, 79–83.

28 Thomas 2011, 79–83.

29 For more on members of the *kṣatriya* class, cf. the discussion of the donor on the Sanskrit stele below § 107.

30 Banerjee 2010, 117.

8

Fig. 8: Terracotta figurine from Ter, Osmanabad, India

26 The resemblance of the terracotta from Berenike to Satavahana figurines is such that there can be little doubt that the Berenike example was made in India. There were commercial and cultural ties between Berenike and the Satavahana Dynasty, which fought constant wars with the Sakas for control of the northwestern Indian coast[31]. Barygaza, Sopara and Kalliena were bustling Satavahana ports. The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (hereafter *PME*), an anonymously authored mid-first century A.D. handbook describing Red Sea and Indian Ocean ports and trade commodities[32], notes cities like Ter and Paithan, from which goods were delivered to the coast[33]. Excavation from the Isis temple courtyard at Berenike of two Satavahana coins dating early to mid-second century A.D. provides additional evidence of contacts (see § 10 above)[34].

27 The *PME* does not mention terracotta figurines *per se*; yet, Ter and Paithan were thriving terracotta production centers. Ter (Tagara in *PME* 51) produced terracotta figurines, so-called Indo-Roman lamps, clay imitations of Roman coins, and local imitations of Mediterranean-made ›Megarian‹ bowls[35]. The figurines and imitation terracotta Roman coins were produced with a double-mold technique suggesting Mediterranean influence[36]. Despite the influence of Mediterranean art on the Ter coroplastic industry, no item of Roman or Hellenistic Mediterranean provenance has so far been documented at the site[37], though artifacts of Mediterranean provenance have been recorded in many other areas of India[38]. It should be noted that similarities between Mediterranean and Indian-made terracotta figurines often make identification of provenance problematic[39]. The challenges associated with identifying certain artifacts as Indian in origin are exemplified by a group of terracotta figurines discovered in the early twentieth century in Memphis by Flinders Petrie. Although their stylistic features and probable dating to the Mauryan period contribute little directly to the analysis of the Satavahana terracotta from Berenike, the scholarly debate surrounding these figurines clearly illustrates the complexity of interpretative frameworks and the multitude of issues that can arise in such identifications[40].

28 The Berenike figurine appears to represent an Indian warrior dressed in armor or a representation of a *yavana* trooper. The abovementioned terracotta from Ter (Fig. 8) is one of few extant depictions of Satavahana soldiers wearing armor. Indeed, Indian military tradition dictated that the upper bodies of warriors were usually naked. Armor, especially with obvious western elements, or a tunic, usually indicate a *yavana*[41]. As the figurine depicts a soldier in ›Mediterranean‹ style chain mail or scale armor, it is, therefore, most likely the representation of a *yavana* warrior. While, in the Hellenistic

31 McLaughlin 2014, 312–339.

32 Casson 1989; Belfiore 2004; Sidebotham 2011, esp. 14 and n. 52 (on p. 286) for bibliography and dating.

33 Casson 1989, 83.

34 Sidebotham et al. 2019, 15 f. pl. 22, 1. 2; Sidebotham et al. 2022, 25 pl. 27, 1. 2.

35 Autiero 2019, 574–584.

36 Brancaccio 2005b, 401.

37 Autiero 2019, 575.

38 Cobb 2018, 216–271.

39 Brancaccio 2005a, 56. 66 f. On mutual influence between the coroplastic industries of the Mediterranean world and India, see, for example, Brancaccio 2005a; Brancaccio 2005b; Brancaccio 2014; Autiero 2017.

40 Harle 1992, 379–384; Strauch 2019, 41 n. 27.

41 Huntington 2014, 67 fig. 5, 11.

period, the term *yavana* applied to the Bactrian and then Indo-Greek kingdoms, from the beginning of the Christian era, it denoted any foreigner from the West[42]. *Yavana* images were often apotropaic talismans[43], and the Berenike figurine may have served this function.

29 The terracotta from Berenike appears to be a blend of Greek, Hellenistic, and Early Roman elements and strong local Satavahana influences, clearly visible on the figurine's face. However, some elements also appear in Gandharan art, which reworked local elements, Indian details and western influences in a more sophisticated manner, and it is worth noting how artists depicted warriors in the Kushan Kingdom[44]. There was extensive contact between the Satavahana/Deccan region and the Kushans[45]. Deccan workshops produced the famous ivory figurine found in Pompeii and the ivory figurines from Baghram, Afghanistan[46]. Northwestern Indian (Kushan) art largely inspired Satavahana art at that time. Western, Persian, and Central Asian art, in turn, inspired the sophisticated art of that area, which includes hundreds of examples of mythological and Buddhist-themed representations[47]. Among the myriad depictions, the most interesting are those showing warriors or the deity Skanda-Kārttikeya[48] with inspiration from the Greco-Macedonian, Achaemenid, and Central Asian worlds. Some depictions have elements similar to the Berenike figurine including scale armor or chain mail with *pteryges*, small shields, spears and elongated ears.

30 While similar to other Satavahana terracotta images, the Berenike terracotta warrior does not meet all the requirements to be securely provenanced in that part of the subcontinent. For example, the technique of making, in clay, a representation of armor is clearly different from that evident in Satavahana terracotta figurines. The Berenike terracotta uses concave relief, while the Satavahana terracotta renders it in convex relief. This, however, may be the result of the artist's creativity or an attempt to enhance the appearance because the mold which produced the terracotta was quite worn.

Stele with Vrishni Triad

by Shailendra Bhandare

31 Made of local anhydritic gypsum from the Berenike area, the relief from the small room adjacent to the Isis temple discussed above is a ›votive stele‹, the lower part of which is lost[49]. The fragment measures just over 38 cm high × 42 cm wide × 7,8 cm thick. It represents the top part of a stele whose original overall dimensions and appearance remain unknown (Fig. 9). The fragment preserves a half-round pediment at the top, which varies from 32,3–37 cm wide × 16–20,5 cm high, supported by two pilasters with sofa-capitals, each of which is approximately 17,5 cm high. The pediment is framed by two narrow borders, one of them rouletted. In the pediment stand three highly stylized anthropomorphic figures. The area of the stele between the pilasters is 31 cm wide and undecorated; it may originally have borne a figural painting, or a dedicatory text written with paint. The style, design and material suggest that it was manufactured in Berenike and placed as a dedication somewhere in the Isis temple.

42 Ray 1988, 312; Autiero 2017, 86.
43 Brancaccio 2005b, 402.
44 Behrendt 2007, 7–19.
45 Brancaccio 2014, 37.
46 Brancaccio 2014, 36–40.
47 Behrendt 2007, 7–19.
48 Mann 2012, 262–271.
49 See n. 17.

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Fig. 9: Vrishni stele

Fig. 10: Detail of three figures at top of Vrishni stele

32 The most interesting feature of the stele is the depiction of three human figures carved in low relief (Fig. 10). The two figures on the sides are slightly larger than that in the center. The central figure – 11 cm tall – depicts a female as seen from slight depictions of breasts. The figure's left hand is akimbo, and the right flexes at the elbow with the palm held high at breast level. The hair of this central figure is a topknot.

33 The two flanking figures are male, and both are similar in execution; they hold their hands, flexed at the elbows, upwards, and carry small implements. The object in the right hand of the figure on the left (14 cm tall including upraised arms) is not very clear, but the object in the left hand is a hook-like implement. The figure on the right (16 cm tall including upraised arms) holds a staff or a pestle in its right hand, while the left hand clutches a small round object.

34 All three figures wear a lower garment, tied to their waists and with a central drooping fold that emanates between their legs. They also wear ring-like earrings, which sit diagonally across their heads and above their shoulders. The depictions and execution are stylized and formal with little emphasis on ›realism‹ conceivably because the small area in which they are shown prevents more detailed execution. The workmanship is not high quality. The emphasis is on the posture and gestures of the figures and on the attributes they carry.

35 The attributes suggest that this triad represents the Vrishni heroes Saṃkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva, and Ekānaṃśā. They belong to the pantheon associated with the Pāñcarātra movement of ›Brahmanic‹ Hinduism, which focused on the devotional worship of five cultic heroes of the Vrishni (Skt. Vṛṣṇi) clan as representations of a supreme God, a sage named Nārāyaṇa[50]. The movement was later absorbed into the Bhāgavata version of Vaishnavism, with Nārāyaṇa being identified with Vishnu (Skt. Viṣṇu), by about the fourth century A.D. Abundant evidence including coins and inscriptions shows that the movement was popular in India from about 200 B.C. onwards. Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva are two of the five Vrishni heroes also referred to as *pañca-vīra* (›five heroes‹). The other three are direct descendants of Vāsudeva: Pradyumna and Aniruddha being his sons and Sāmba being a grandson. In Vaishnava rendering of these

50 For an introduction to the Pāñcarātra movement, see Schrader 1916.

heroes, Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva are identified with Balarāma and Krishna (Skt. Kṛṣṇa), both manifestations (*avatāra*) of Vishnu. Ekānaṃśā (literally meaning ›indivisible‹) is the sister of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva and a ›protector‹ of Krishna in the *Harivaṃśa*, a fundamental text of the Vaishnavas[51].

36 The earliest datable representation of the five Vrishni heroes occurs on Indian coins. The best known are on silver drachms of the Indo-Greek ruler Agathocles (reigned ca. 185–180 B.C.). These were excavated in Ai Khanoum[52] (Fig. 11) and bear representations of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva on their obverses and reverses, respectively. In line with the ›realism‹ of Indo-Greek coin design, these show the deities with their attributes and with elaborate umbrella-like headgear, long upper and lower garments with folds and pointed Indian-style shoes. Saṃkarṣaṇa holds a club or pestle in one hand and a plough in the other. Vāsudeva holds a wheel in one hand and a conch shell in the other. The treatment of their heads and earrings is similar to that on the Berenike stele.

37 Depictions similar to the stylized imagery on the stele also appear on local punch-marked coins dated ca. 200–150 B.C. from the Mathura region[53]. Because these were struck from very small dies, such as a punch, they are more stylized and smaller than representations on the Agathocles drachms. The images appear as frontal ›stick figures‹, and, like those on the Berenike stele, they hold the attributes above their heads in raised hands flexed at the elbows (Fig. 12). To the right is Vāsudeva, who holds a wheel in his left hand; to the left is Saṃkarṣaṇa, who wields a plough. In their right hands, both heroes grasp a stick-like club or pestle. As E. Errington has shown, these representations are amongst a repertoire of stylized divine figures seen on these coins.

38 There are no coins known that bear an identifiable depiction of Ekānaṃśā alongside her two brothers. A ›three human figures‹ punch seen on silver punch-marked coins might represent the Vrishni triad of Saṃkarṣaṇa-Ekānaṃśā-Vāsudeva, but this observation lacks substantiation[54]. The depiction of a female figure on the reverse of bronze coins of the Indo-Greek (Bactrian) rulers Agathocles (reigned ca. 190–180 B.C.) and Pantaleon (reigned ca. 190–180 B.C.) may be of Subhadrā, possibly another sister of Saṃkarṣaṇa-Balarāma and Vāsudeva-Krishna[55]. These coins share important typological features with the Agathocles drachms from Aï Khanoum, such as bilingual Greek and Brahmi/Kharosthi legends. However, the figure holds a lotus bloom or bud, an iconographic feature of the goddess Lakshmi (Skt. Lakṣmī). Indeed, R. Audouin and P. Bernard have identified the goddess as such[56].

39 Apart from figural depictions, symbolic representations of Vrishni heroes appear on many series of ancient Indian coins from northern India and the Deccan, in particular the post-Mauryan coinages of uninscribed and inscribed localized types.

11

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Fig. 11: Silver drachm of Indo-Greek king Agathocles (ca.185 B.C.) showing Saṃkarṣaṇa (left) and Vāsudeva (right). The Shivlee Collection, USA

Fig. 12: Obverse (left) and reverse (right) of Indian punch marked coin (ca. 200–150 B.C.) from Mathura. Private collection, The Netherlands

51 For a discussion of Ekānaṃśā in the context of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva as mentioned in the *Harivaṃśa*, see Couture – Schmid 2001, 173–192.

52 Audouin – Bernard 1974, 7–41.

53 Errington 2011.

54 Paul – Paul 1989, 111–143.

55 Bopearachchi 2016.

56 Audouin – Bernard 1974, 23.

The plough and the wheel, referring to Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva, are most common[57]. Some of these sit atop pillars or standards, which may be railed, suggesting that they were cultic objects. In rarer instances, a standard bearing the chimera *makara* (forepart of an elephant and hind part of a fish), the symbol of Pradyumna, also occurs on coins[58].

40 Epigraphically, a few inscriptions dedicated to or mentioning the Bhāgavata movement are noteworthy. The first is a Brahmi text, the ›Hathibada Ghosundi inscription‹, dated to approximately the first century B.C., which has been discovered in multiple iterations scattered near the ancient site of Nagari, in Chittorgarh district, Rajasthan[59]. The inscription marks the creation of a stone enclosure for the worship of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva and a grove for Nārāyaṇa. The donor refers to himself as a *bhāgavata*. This is the earliest reference to the dedication of a shrine to the Vrishni deities. The Heliodorus Pillar inscription[60], carved in the lower register of a pillar (Skt. *dhvaja*) with a Garuḍa capital at the site of Besnagar near Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, mentions that the pillar was a »Garuḍa standard of Vāsudeva, the god of gods«. Its donor, Heliodorus, emissary of the Greek ruler Antialcidas of Taxila, identifies himself as a *bhāgavata*. Remnants of pillars with a palm-tree and a *makara* capital at the same site mark its association with the Bhāgavata movement[61]. The Naneghat cave inscription[62], commissioned by a Satavahana queen, offers salutations to Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva in its opening lines. Both inscriptions date to about the mid to late first century B.C. The dedication of shrines for worship of the Vrishni heroes continued in the first century A.D. and occurs on two inscriptions – namely the Mora Well inscription[63] and the Vasu doorjamb inscription[64] – found near the great Vaishnava center of Mathura. Both date to the reign of the Scythian Kshatrapa ruler Śoḍāsa (ca. A.D. 15). The Mora Well inscription references a »matchless stone house« created as a sanctuary for images of the five Vrishni heroes, while the Vasu doorjamb inscription dedicates a stone gateway (Skt. *toraṇa*) and a railing at »the great temple of Vāsudeva«.

41 The most numerous sculptural instances of the triad of Saṃkarṣaṇa-Ekānaṃśā-Vāsudeva have been recovered from across Mathura. Recently, V. K. Gupta surveyed such depictions in detail[65]; and the contributions of N. P. Joshi[66] on the iconography of both Ekānaṃśā and Saṃkarṣaṇa are a pioneering attempt. Gupta discusses the triadic representation of these deities by noting a lesser-known early painted representation from a rock shelter at Tikla in Gwalior district (Madhya Pradesh). It dates to about the second to first centuries B.C., based on the paleography of an attributive Brahmi inscription that accompanies it[67]. Gupta lists triadic representations from Mathura, Sanghel near Nuh in Haryana, Bangarmau in the Unnao district, Uttar Pradesh, and from Pakistan. The main iconographic feature of such representations, apart from the attributes that the two heroes carry, is the order in which they are presented: Saṃkarṣaṇa is in the row, to the left, followed by Ekānaṃśā in the middle and Vāsudeva on the right. Ekānaṃśā always appears smaller than the two male figures. She places her right hand in a gesture of reassurance (Skt. *abhayamudrā*) while her left hand is folded near her waist, and she sometimes carries a water pot in it. The iconographic definition of the triad that appears in the Sanskrit text *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*

57 Pieper 2021, 368 nos. 2378. 2379; 542 nos. 3330–3337.
58 Pieper 2021, 101 f. nos. 679. 680.
59 Bhandarkar 1933/1934, 198–205.
60 Salomon 1998, 265–267.
61 Shaw 2016, 73 f.
62 Mirashi 1981, 131–134.
63 Quintanilla 2007, 260.
64 Quintanilla 2007, 262 f.
65 Gupta 2019, 69–90.
66 Joshi 1968, 24–29 (Hindi); Joshi 1969, 7–26 (Hindi). 34–36; Joshi 1979.
67 Gupta 2019, 71 has dated the rock painting to »late 3rd and the 2nd century BCE«; however, judging by the palaeography of the inscription, the present author's view is to date it to ca. second to first centuries B.C.

(about the fifth to sixth centuries A.D.)[68] clearly mentions the icon of Ekānaṃśā shown »in between Baladeva and Krishna« and »has one hand resting on the waist«. These standard features exactly match the depiction on the Berenike stele, leaving no doubt about its identity as a Vrishni triad.

42 The foregoing discussion illustrates the popularity of the Vrishni heroes and their consorts and attributes as foci of veneration in the Bhāgavata movement. Most known iconic representations and inscriptional references belong to the Early Historic Period, ca. second century B.C. to second century A.D., although texts like the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* suggest continued popularity of the movement after it was absorbed into the greater folds of Vaishnavism.

43 The Berenike stele is the only known representation of the Vrishni triad documented from outside India. Stylistically, it fits into the milieu in which the Bhāgavata movement had been very popular in India, i. e., the first two centuries A.D. That it was manufactured locally in Berenike, as suggested by its format, design and material of construction, makes it significant evidence for maritime interactions, trade and movement of people from India to the eastern Mediterranean. Such interaction is, of course, attested through finds of imported and exported objects – two very famous examples being the so-called ivory statuette commonly referred to as the ›Pompeii Lakshmi‹[69] and the bronze statue of the ›Alexandrine Neptune‹ excavated at Brahmapuri, near Kolhapur in Maharashtra[70]. There has been extensive research documenting and analyzing Indian-made objects reflecting ›Roman influence‹ found in peninsular India[71]. These range from small and ›minor‹ imitations of Roman coins in clay and metal to large cultural testaments such as funerary stelai and monumental decorations with motifs such as sphinxes or winged bulls and horses. But evidence for the flow of ›transculturation‹ in the other direction, i. e., from India westward, is a mere trickle by comparison. The Berenike stele begins to fill this lacuna.

Three Fragmented Images of Buddha

by Marianne Bergmann

44 Excavations in 2018, 2019 and 2022 documented three dedications in the form of representations of Buddha: two statuettes, one of them broken and incomplete but with its head, and the second one, smaller and headless; the third object was a head, which belonged to another, now missing, body. All were excavated in fourth- to fifth-century contexts, which provide no more than a *terminus ante quem*.

The Gypsum Head

45 The head, 9,3 cm high (Fig. 13)[72], is made of the same anhydritic gypsum as the stele with Vrishni triad discussed above and the Sanskrit stele presented below (§ 91–117)[73]. This stone was used for most sculptures and inscriptional bases found at Berenike[74]. In the following, we sometimes use, as many geologists do, the short form ›gypsum‹. The head's heavy-lidded and distorted eyes and the mouth, with corners

68 Sastri – Bhat 1946, 512.
69 See Evers 2017, 22–47 for a recent discussion of its purpose; cf. here § 38.
70 Khandalavala 1960; De Puma 1991, 82–86 fig. 5, 1–3; cf. p. 63; cf. here § 120.
71 Recently, de Saxcé 2015.
72 Reg. no. BE19-126/016/001.
73 Harrell 2024, 132 f. 365–367.
74 Harrell 2021.

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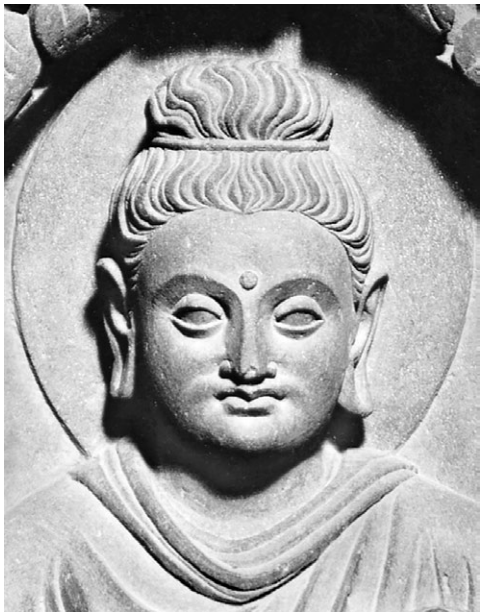

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Fig. 13: Small head of Buddha (from room abutting southern exterior wall of the Isis temple), anhydritic gypsum; left: front view – middle: left profile view – right: top view

Fig. 14: Head of sitting Buddha, from a relief frieze. Washington, D.C., Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art, Freer Gallery (cf. Fig. 29)

forming incised triangles, connect it with several other heads of roughly the same size, among them a warrior's head (h. 11,2 cm), a broken half of a female head (h. 9 cm) and a head of Isis with a small crown and umbrella-shaped nimbus (h. 11,8 cm) (Fig. 15), which was once completely gilded (Fig. 17)[75]; two of these came from the Isis temple courtyard as well[76]. Excavations in 2023 recovered another head made in this workshop in the portico of the Isis temple (Fig. 16). It represents Sarapis and measures 10,7 cm high (with its *polos*); like the head of Isis, it had been completely gilded at one time[77].

46 The hairstyle of the head discussed here points towards India and Buddha. The hair is combed upwards in broad and wavy strands, more simplified on the back and collected at the top in a flat knot bound with a ribbon. Topknots of this kind are unknown in the Greco-Roman and Egyptian world[78]. In India, Buddha wears this coiffure (Fig. 14)[79], as do ascetics represented in scenes of Buddha's life and other figures of modest status. As the head lacks Buddha's nimbus, the round mark in the middle of the front (*ūrṇā)* and elongated earlobes – in fact it has no ears at all – one might doubt that it represents Buddha. But the find context in a temple and the association with other images of Buddha and the Buddhist inscription make identification with a Buddha much more plausible than other possibilities.

75 Cf. the umbrella-nimbi of the personification of ›Parthenos‹, characterized as the zodiacal sign of ›virgo‹ in Pompeian wall paintings: Simon 1961, 140–151 figs. 22. 23. 25.

76 Half female head: BE18-113/010/015 from temple forecourt: Sidebotham et al. 2020, 18 f. pl. 22, 2; Isis : BE18-113/010/004 from temple forecourt: Sidebotham et al. 2019, 16 pl. 21, 4. Warrior: BE19-116/039/001 from the Northern Complex: Sidebotham et al. 2020, 14 pls. 7, 7; 22, 2. A wreathed male head with short curls (BE22-150B/29/002 + BE22-999/23) following Meroitic iconography but surely to be ascribed to this workshop was also found 2022 in the temple forecourt: Sidebotham et al. 2022, 22 f. 26 f. pl 26, 1. 2.

77 Trench BE23-135/015/006. There were very small flakes of gold on the *polos*, border of the hair, and in the beard, not visible on photographs because of the rough surfaces.

78 The only exception is the so-called Suebian knot, worn in a diagonal position; see Onyshchuk – Schuster 2020. The famous Roman portrait-type of a bearded male with topknot, known through several replicas sometimes interpreted as an ambassador from India visiting Hadrian or perhaps an Indian captive from Traian's Forum, needs a new study; see with bibliography Schröder 2004, 451–454 no. 201.

79 The head is a detail of a relief-cycle in Washington, D.C., National Museum of Asian Art, Freer Gallery, acc. no. F 1949. 9a–d: Kurita 2003, fig. 66; Lippe 1970, 16–18 pl. 11; another detail of this relief here in Fig. 29; cf. Kurita 2003, figs. 67. 176. 177. 434–446. 656; for Gandharan Buddhas it is the most common type of coiffure, cf. Rhi 2008.

15

Fig. 15: Gypsum sculptures from workshop of the head in Fig. 13. Left: Warrior's head – middle: half broken female head – right: head of Isis

Fig. 16: Sarapis head excavated from Isis temple in 2023 with remains of gilding

Fig. 17: Gold flakes on Isis head

47 The head preserves no traces of gold, as was found on the heads of Isis (Fig. 15. 17) and Sarapis (Fig. 16) from the same workshop. If it had been gilded, this, too, might point to Buddha, and in that case was probably part of the order of an Indian client. Complete gilding of stone-sculptures is rare in the Greco-Roman world[80]. It occurs more in Egypt, where gold represented the unperishable flesh of the gods[81], but also in Kushan Gandhara, where gold may have represented light with »obvious cognitive and symbolic links with the experience of enlightenment by Buddha and other perfected beings«, which was, in another way, represented by the nimbus discussed below[82]. The Chinese pilgrim Song Yun, who travelled to India in the sixth century, claims to have seen in one place »many buildings decorated by not less than 6000 golden images«[83]. Furthermore, both cultures cultivated the custom of gilding other venerable objects or their surroundings, a procedure still used in India today[84].

16

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80 Cf. complete gilding of the marble statue of the Diadoumenos from Delos: Bourgeois – Jockey 2004; for gold on Hellenistic marble sculpture more generally, see Blume 2015, I 52–54. 104–107.

81 Daumas 1956; Aufrère 1991, 377–381.

82 For gilding in Gandharan sculpture and architecture, cf. a relief in the Metropolitan Museum in Behrendt 2007, 34 fig. 31; furthermore Luczanits 2008, 208 cat. 129; Rhi 2018, 46 fig. 16; for the spread of gilding and for its techniques, Pannuzi – Talarico 2018 and the contributions in Restauro Archeologico 27/1, 2019, among them especially Zaminga et al. 2019, 90–99, from which the citations are taken (p. 92); for the nimbus, see below § 69–73.

83 Zaminga et al. 2019, 92.

84 An unpublished dedication from the reign of Titus inscribed twice on doorjambs in the Berenike Isis temple refers to the gilding of the temple's propylon. N. Ahuja (personal communication) first drew my attention to the modern habit of gilding sacred objects in India.

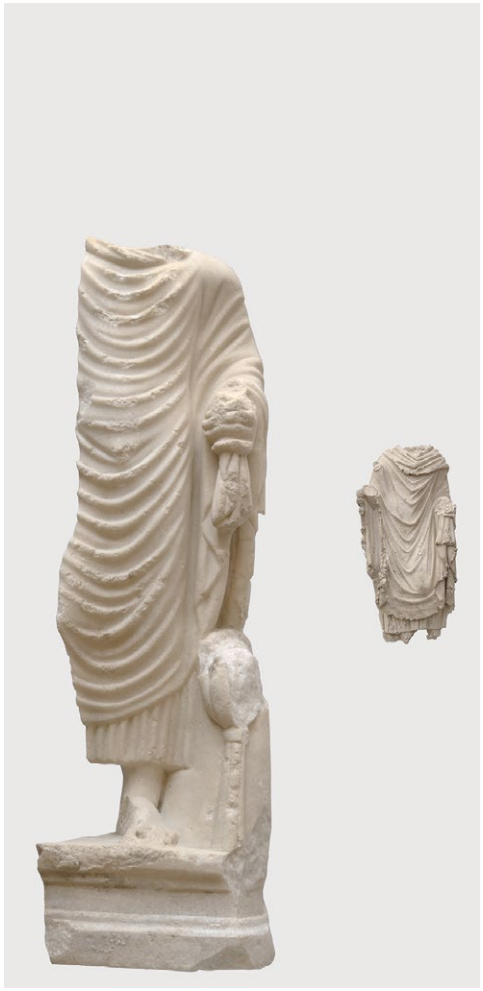

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Fig. 18: Two Buddha statuettes from Berenike. Left: larger marble body from the Isis temple – right: small headless statuette from the Northern Complex

Fig. 19: Body and nimbed head of marble Buddha joined. 3D photogrammetric reconstruction

48 On the Berenike Buddha's head, missing details, such as the ears and *ūrṇā*, may have been added in paint, even atop a gilded surface[85]. The missing nimbus might be explained by an aversion to representing nimbi in stone in Greco-Roman culture (see below § 73)[86].

49 The incised pupils and irises of the heads provide a probable *terminus post quem* in the reign of the Roman emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117–138) for the local workshop proposed here[87]. How much later the workshop was active is impossible to say.

The Buddha with Nimbus and the Headless Body of a Buddha

50 The two Buddha statuettes are discussed together here because they represent the same type of Gandharan Buddha: the small headless statuette from the Northern Complex and the larger standing figure, which joins with the nimbed head excavated in the Isis temple courtyard in 2022 (Fig. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22)[88].

85 Cf. the *ūrṇā* added in paint on stucco heads like Behrendt 2007, 79 fig. 61.

86 The umbrella-nimbus of the Isis (Fig. 15 right) is a rare exception, surely intended as a special attribute.

87 This transition took place during the production of portraits of Hadrian's lover Antinoos, which mostly belong to the period between his death in the Nile in A.D. 130 and Hadrian's death in A.D. 138: Fittschen – Zanker 1985, 60; there are earlier but rare exceptions, which need not be discussed here; for the forms of eyes in Gandhara and India, see Olivieri 2022, 157–161.

88 At a colloquium held in Freiburg in 2019, S. Bhandare and colleagues immediately identified the two statuette fragments as Buddha figures.

20

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Fig. 20: Small headless statuette from the Northern Complex. Left: front – middle: back – right: left profile

Fig. 21: Body of the larger, marble Buddha. Left: front – middle: back – right: left profile

22

Fig. 22: Nimbed marble head of Buddha. Left: front view – right: rear view

51 The smaller statuette, from the Northern Complex (Fig. 18 right; 20), is 15,8 cm high[89]. Its head, most of its right forearm and hand and its lower legs, feet and base are missing[90]. Preserved are the body in a voluminous garment, its left arm, the left hand with some fingers, the right arm down to the elbow, and small parts of its legs, which protrude from underneath the garment. A support behind its right leg provided stability. ›Pompons‹ visible on the garment's borders are not artificial, but are rather natural accretions or efflorescences, similar to the large one covering the broken neck. The statuette is made of an extremely fine-grained non-transparent white stone, probably gypsum[91]. Anhydritic gypsum exists on Ras Banas and along the western coast of the Red Sea and also in parts of the Mediterranean[92]. Thus, the stone may be a very fine, though previously unseen, local gypsum, or else an imported ›alabaster‹. If it is local gypsum, the pompons could be efflorescences resulting from weathering processes[93]. However, such efflorescences are not extant on other gypsum sculptures from Berenike; the pompons might also be calcareous.

52 The body of the larger statuette found without its head in 2018 (Fig. 18 left; 19. 21) is 53 cm tall[94], 46,5 cm without the base. It is made from coarse-grained white marble that broke cleanly along a vertical vein passing through the figure (Fig. 21). What survives is almost two thirds of the left part of the body and the greater part of a profiled pedestal, preserved due to a massive support on the figure's left side. The flat pedestal, with lower and upper architectonic profiles, is a long-used late Hellenistic-Roman type, known, for example, from Pompeii[95].

53 The nimbed head of Buddha (Fig. 19. 22. 37. 41), which joins with this body, measures 11,5 cm from chin to crown without the topknot, 15 cm with it. From the back, the joined fragments form a disc, as the contour of the nimbus continues behind the figure's shoulders (Fig. 22 right). The diameter of the disc is 19,4 cm. The complete height of the statuette with its base, head and nimbus is 71,1 cm. The figure only, without

89 BE19-116/039/018.

90 In the following, ›right‹ and ›left‹ are used from the point of view of the figures.

91 Personal communication from M. Bojanowski (Warsaw).

92 J. A. Harrell (personal communication) and on Egypt: Harrell 2024, 357–367, cf. above n. 14.

93 On characteristics of this gypsum, see Harrell 2021 and Harrell 2024, 132 f.

94 BE18-113/010/005.

95 Seiler 1992, 121 no. 48; 123 figs. 610. 611.

base, top-knot and nimbus, is 57,5 cm high. The view from the back shows how the vein that caused the right part of the body to break away continues upwards into the furrow between the head and nimbus, causing them to break apart, too. In summer 2023, the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities restored the statuette, which is shown here in 3D scans and a photogrammetric reconstruction (Fig. 19), and transferred it to the newly opened Suez Canal Museum at Ismailiya, where it is on display as sculptural evidence for ancient seaborne trade across the Mediterranean, Egypt and India.

54 Egypt produced little marble, which was considered usable in the Greco-Roman period[96], and since the Ptolemaic period it imported Greek marble for the production of sculpture. The mainly white marble of the statuette is medium- to coarse-grained, mainly white with a slightly gray zone at the break between the body and the neck. The gray ›band‹ led initially to the impression that the marble came from the quarries on Proconnesus[97], in the Sea of Marmara, not far from present day Istanbul. Proconnesian marble had been employed regionally since the sixth century B.C.; large-scale exportation across the Roman world began during the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117–138) and reached Egypt via Alexandria[98]. Normally strongly gray-banded, it was commonly used for sarcophagi, architectural ornamentation (e. g., column capitals), wall revetments and pavements but also for sculpture. Excavations at Berenike have also recorded Proconnesian revetment and pavement fragments, also in the temple courtyard[99]. The find of the head, however, underlined the nearly pure white quality of the statuette and in combination with the remarkable glittering of the crystals in the breaks and the grain-size suggests that the Indian customer chose for his votive statuette marble from the quarries of Paros. Parian *Lychnites*, completely white and translucent, was for centuries the finest white Greek marble used for sculpture in the Greek and, later, the Roman world. A second quality (Paros 2) is white with slight gray zones, also translucent – more than Proconnesian marble, and mostly coarse-grained[100]. It was widespread, too, and seems to have been popular in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt[101]. The marble of Paros 2 seems a likely identification of origin for the material used for the Buddha statuette.

23

Fig. 23: Illustration of first stage of draping the outer garment (saṅghāṭi)

The Statuettes' Bodies, Their Common Typology

55 The combination of basic formal elements of the two statuettes, that is, their posture, their garments, the way these are draped, and their gestures, is the same in both and, thus, constitutes their common ›type‹. This is easily recognizable as copied from the main type of

96 Gebel Rokham (at 25° 18.07' N/33° 57.96' E) in the Eastern Desert is the one source of regionally available marble, which seems to have been used in some isolated cases for sculpture of the Pharaonic period, but has not been identified in sculptures of the Hellenistic and Roman period: Klemm – Klemm 1993, 427–429; Harrell 2019, 5. 48. 62–64. 68. 71 (Table 2, 1 no. 36) and Harrell 2024, 509. 626. 653–656 notes work at the quarry in Roman times. Alford 1900, 31 noted part of a broken image in white marble at the Ptolemaic/Early Roman station in Wadi Miya, and Harrell suspects that it was marble from Gebel Rokham, though it might not be.

97 Sidebotham et al. 2022, 23 f.

98 Ward-Perkins 1992; cf. for earlier and later use below § 78 with n. 153.

99 Harrell 1996, 111; Harrell 1998, 142; Harrell 2007, 169 f.

100 Strab. 10, 5, 7; Plin. nat. 36, 14; Herz 2010.

101 For the Ptolemaic period different varieties of Parian marble are demonstrated by scientific analyses in: Goette – Nagy 2024, nos. 72. 73. 75–78.

24

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Fig. 24: Broken surface on top of the left hand and wrist of the marble statuette, which is a remain of the protruding bunch of cloth as in Fig. 27. 29. 32. 33. 34. 35

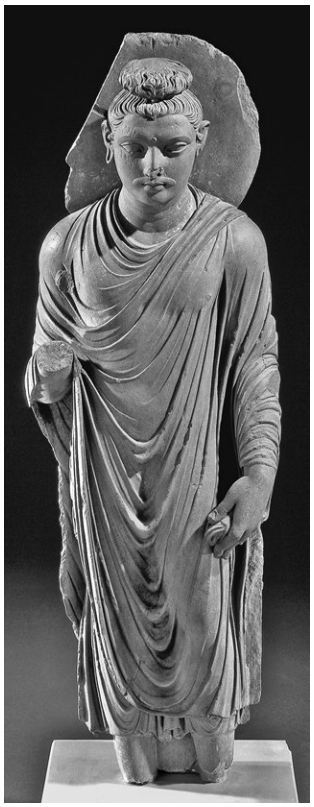
Fig. 25: Broken surface above the left hand and wrist of the statuette from Northern Complex, which is a remain of the protruding bunch of cloth as in Fig. 32 and 34

standing Buddhas of Gandhara. The details of the sculptural execution, especially the material character of the garments, i. e., the ›styles‹ of execution, are, however, different from the probable Gandharan models, and they also differ between both statuettes. In thinking about the possible models used by the sculptors and related questions, these two levels of the statuettes' formal appearance must be carefully distinguished.

56 Both bodies wear a long, thin underrobe with fine folds that end horizontally at the lower half of the legs. Over it, both figures have a voluminous outer garment covering them to the neck, where some material is pushed together, slightly rolled on the larger figure and more voluminous on the smaller one. Fig. 23 shows the probable first part of the draping, then one takes the long end (it is too long in the illustration, for which a material had to be used that ›falls‹ in the correct way), pulls it along the front and throws it back again over the left shoulder, so that it falls vertically down the back[102]. This is depicted clearly on the back of the smaller statuette (Fig. 20), where the vertical folds fall from the figure's left shoulder and across the part of the garment that first was pulled along the figure's back. On the back of the larger statuette (Fig. 21), the same kind of draping is surely intended but is less clear. As on the smaller statuette, there is also a strong vertical fold on the left side of the figure's back. But it appears to hang down only from the upper left arm, and it is not clear that the vertical fold should overlap the diagonal ones, which cross over the back. As depicted, the draping of the outer garment would have no beginning and no end. Evidently, the sculptor allowed himself more freedom to simplify the figure's back than did the sculptor of the smaller statuette (see below § 65).

57 If the arms of the two figures had extended down, the upper garment would have completely covered them. However, the figures lift their arms, which causes the big U- and V-folds on the fronts. The left forearm of each is raised to the level of the waist and holds part of the garment's hem or some extra cloth (see below § 65), a portion of which hangs down from the fist; the hem then falls further down in zigzag-folds. A fractured oval surface above the left wrist of the marble statuette (Fig. 24) and a broken upper part of the left wrist of the gypsum statuette (Fig. 25) indicate that a piece of cloth once protruded upwards from between the fingers and extended slightly backwards to avoid

102 Cf. the back view of the figures sitting at Buddha's deathbed: Luczanits 2008, 233 no. 178.



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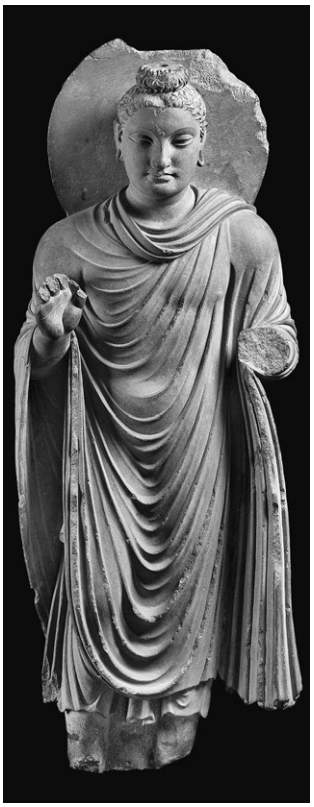

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Fig. 26: Gandharan Buddha statue. London, British Museum

Fig. 27: Gandharan Buddha relief. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

Fig. 28: Gandharan Buddha statue. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

Fig. 29: Left hand with bunch of cloth on sitting Buddha. Washington, D.C., Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art (cf. Fig. 14)

or impede breakage. The gesture of the right arm is preserved only on the small statuette (Fig. 20). The arm bends sharply upwards at the elbow and was, evidently, held vertically, connected to the shoulder by a strut, the broken end of which is visible. The larger statuette is barefoot (Fig. 36).

The Statuettes' Bodies as Representations of Gandharan Type Buddhas

58 The characteristics displayed by the two Berenike statuettes correspond to the main Gandharan type[103] of standing Buddha developed sometime in the first to early second century A.D. and disseminated throughout the Kushan empire, which dominated Gandhara and northern India in ca. A.D. 30–300, with its period of greatest extent under Kanishka I (cf. Fig. 30). Kanishka I's reign is now dated to A.D. 127–150, based on H. Falk's interpretation of an astronomical text and corroborated by numismatic evidence, as J. Cribb has demonstrated[104].

59 Three artifacts in the Ashmolean and the British Museums illustrate the main Gandharan type of freestanding Buddha through the following features (Fig. 26. 27. 28)[105]: the visible garments[106], the way the outer ›over robe‹ (*saṅghāṭi*) is draped and covers both shoulders[107], naked feet (not preserved in this case)[108], and the position of the right

29

103 Here ›type‹ is used in a broad sense for the general type of Gandharan Buddha, in relation to which the (probable workshop-)types defined by Rhi 2008 would be subtypes.

104 Falk 2001, 121–136; Cribb 2018, 7–34.

105 Fig. 26: Zwalf 1996 I 81 f. cat. 2 color pl. 1; II pl. 9, 1; Fig. 27: Jongeward 2019, 70 no. 40; Fig. 28: Jongeward 2019, 92 f. no. 62.

106 The Gandharan Buddhas are supposed to wear at least two undergarments under the covering *saṅghāṭi*, which are sometimes visible on the open right side (Zwalf 1996, I 40). The Greco-Roman sculptors represented only one, as was usual with the Greek *chiton* and *himation*.

107 In contrast to the way monks wore it leaving one shoulder bare.

108 Naked feet: Zwalf 1996, II figs. 1. 3. 4. 6. 11. 12. 16, etc.

30

Fig. 30: Gold stater of Kanishka I with Boddo legend, written BoΔΔo with Greek letters, shortly before A.D. 150. Hirayama Ikuo Silk Road Museum, Yamanashi, Japan

forearm, which is part of Buddha's most common gesture of *abhayamudrā* (signaling ›no danger/no fear‹). With the ›no danger/no fear‹ signal, the right forearm and hand are vertical with the palm facing outwards (Fig. 27. 28). Also, on some of Buddha's freestanding images, a strut held the right forearms in this gesture – now mostly broken – remains of which are extant (Fig. 26), in the same way as on the small statuette from Berenike (Fig. 20 left)[109]. However, Gandharan sculptors more often avoided the danger of breakage during work and transport by carving the right arm separately and attaching it with a dowel[110]. For the left arm's position, the Gandharan type developed two main variants. In the first, the left arm hangs down loosely and holds part of the *saṅghāṭi*'s hem (Fig. 26)[111]. In the second, the left arm is raised to the height of the waist or breast, holding the hem of the *saṅghāṭi* with an upward projection of fabric resembling a bunch of cloth between the fingers and with material falling down below the hand (Fig. 27)[112]. This gesture of the left hand also appears frequently on images of the sitting Buddha (Fig. 29)[113]. There, the left hand is raised slightly more and the fabric protruding above the gripping hand often forms a loop, falling back or to the side, which may explain the form of the broken surfaces on the hands of the Berenike statuettes (Fig. 24. 25). Both of the Berenike statuettes repeat this second Gandharan variant of the standing Buddha.

60 In freestanding sculptures, the second variant of the gesture seems much rarer than the first, if only for technical reasons. For example, in the collection published by I. Kurita[114], the relationship of freestanding Buddha figures with hanging left arm to those with clearly or probably raised left arm is 14 : 5. It is remarkable that Kanishka I used the latter type for Buddha representations on the reverse of gold coins bearing the legend BODDO in Greek letters (Fig. 30)[115] alongside a number of Greek, Iranian, Scythian and some Indian gods. Cribb dates the BODDO series to the end of Kanishka I's reign, i. e., shortly before A.D. 150[116]. The Berenike statuettes not only follow models that represent the same general type of Buddha figure as Kanishka's BODDO coins but are also remarkably similar in the way they present the uplifted hem of the *saṅghāṭi*, which protrudes from the left fist like a bouquet of flowers.

The Two Statuettes as ›Copies‹ of Gandharan/Indian Models

61 As noted, the stone from which they were made indicates that the Berenike statuettes were not imported from India. Furthermore, a 1984 study of stones used for Indian sculptures with probable dates between the second century B.C. and the sixteenth century A.D. suggests that Gandhara and India did not employ marble in the Kushan period and only very rarely used gypsum[117].

109 Cf. Kurita 1990, fig. 218; Zwalf 1996, II figs. 2. 6. 9. 10. 13. 15; Rhi 2018, figs. 10 (?). 16.

110 Right arm formerly inserted or attached: Kurita 1990, figs. 196. 199. 200; cf. the right arm stumps in Rhi 2018, figs. 5. 6 (?). 18. 19.

111 Zwalf 1996, cf. here n. 105.

112 On freestanding sculptures this arm is frequently broken, as in Fig. 28; cf. Kurita 1990, figs. 197. 201. 206. 207. 209. 213–219. 221. 222. 234–236. 269. 278; Kurita 2003, fig. 10.

113 This is another detail of the relief Kurita 2003, fig. 226 (see above n. 79), in Washington, D.C., National Museum of Asian Art, Freer Gallery. For a possible special meaning of the gesture, see Filigenzi 2005.

114 Kurita 1990, figs. 196. 199. 200.

115 For the type Cribb 1980, 80 no. 1 with fig. on p. 85; Tanabe 1987; Cribb 1999/2000, 158 f. 165 f. nos. 1–3 pl. 1, 1; cf. the gold quarter staters 166 nos. 4–6 pl. 1, 4. 5 and the dies pl. 7. The stater in the Hirayama Ikuo Museum is the main object of Tanabe 1987 and cited in Cribb 1999/2000, 166 no. 3 pl. 7, 3 with further literature.

116 Cribb 1999/2000, 162.

117 Newman 1984: Among the samples taken from 187 objects in American museums, there is one piece from Kushan Gandhara that Newman calls carbonaceous gypsum rock: 57 table 8, which does not correspond

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Fig. 31: Buddha statuette from Northern Complex

Fig. 32: Gandharan standing Buddha. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

Fig. 33: Buddha marble statuette from Isis temple courtyard

62 Like the stone, the styles of execution also indicate that the two images were not imported from Gandhara or India. While keeping the basic iconographic elements of the Gandharan/Kushan type, the sculptors interpreted the style of the garments freely and very differently from one another. In the Gandharan standing Buddha, garments cling to a slightly muscular body (Fig. 32); drapery folds resemble strings of different sizes, whose organization follows the *volumina* and movement of the body and its limbs. Although there is a tendency to make parallel folds, there is a division into an upper and lower part of the figures. The lower part repeats heavy drapery folds in more or less parallel curves. The slightly protruding belly often lacks folds and marks a horizontal division underlined by the uppermost drapery fold of the lower body. In the upper part of the body, the drapery and its folds are often asymmetrical. In more sophisticated figures, strongly curving folds run from the figure's left shoulder to its right upper arm, while another, smaller group of folds running from some point between the neck and left shoulder to the right shoulder is often separated. Its folds may be more or less curved than the lower ones. They can run more horizontally or leave the right shoulder without folds. The asymmetric system of this part of the garment appeared for centuries, sometimes even on sculptures of modest quality. Additionally, there are simplified versions, even among large statues, in which all folds on the upper part of the body are

to the piece from Berenike; one fine-grained seventh-century marble: 17 table 4; and one eleventh-century piece made of an undefined marble: 56 table 7. A remarkable exception is the fabulous Bodhisattva acrolith from Peshawar in the Ortiz Collection, most probably made by a Roman sculptor: Bopearachchi 2007.

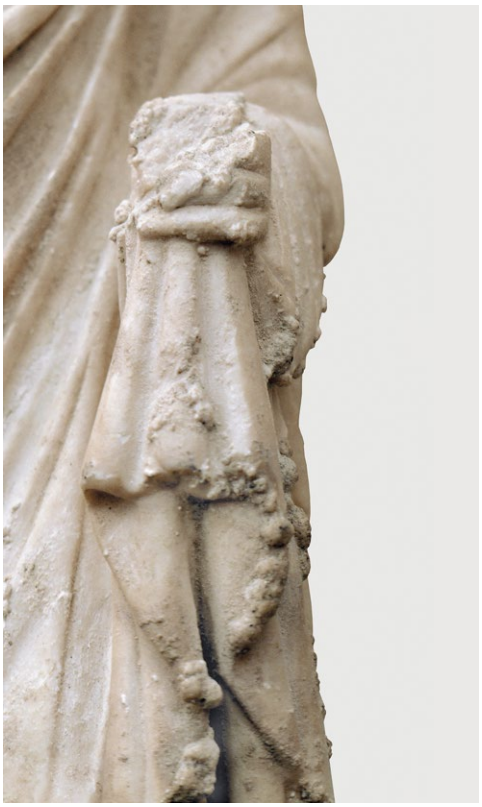

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Fig. 34: Left hand of the Buddha statuette from Northern Complex lifting up hem of saṅghāṭi

Fig. 35: Left hand of the marble Buddha statuette lifting up a kerchief, seemingly a hem of the saṅghāṭi

curved lines that start from the left shoulder and fan out to the right arm; these are also asymmetrical but less so[118]. In small formats all folds of drapery may be parallel.

63 The sculptor of the smaller, gypsum statuette (Fig. 31) maintained the principal characteristics of the most differentiated version of this drapery, with a stronger transversal fold in the middle, which divides an upper and a lower part, and with steeper and deeper folds on the upper body's left side and flatter and less steep ones on the right. Yet, he translated the model into a Greco-Roman style with a garment that falls loosely, giving the impression of varying distances between body and garment, and with different volumes and directions of the drapery folds[119].

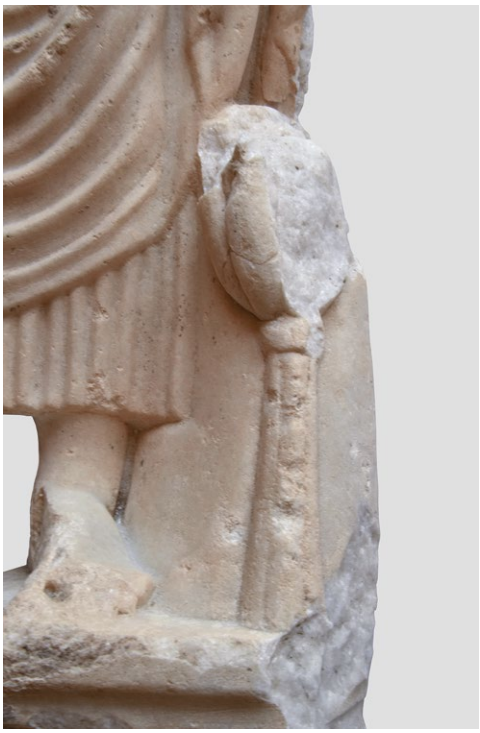
64 On the larger, marble statuette (Fig. 33) one observes the opposite. Nearly all drapery folds from the *saṅghāṭi*'s lower hem to the neck are parallel, equidistant, uniform, their curves mostly symmetrical. Movement of the (missing) right arm and knee causes only slight disturbances of the system on the belly and the right knee. The visible folds of the undergarment are regular too. The general subtle modelling and the loose fall of the garment down from the arm on the statuette's left side (Fig. 21) show that the extreme regularity on its front is a deliberate stylization (see below § 87).

65 On closer examination, one sees that the gesture of the Buddha's left hand is also different for the two statuettes (Fig. 34. 35). It is often not easy to understand which hem of the *saṅghāṭi* the left hand of the Gandharan Buddha-type grasps, even on the large freestanding statues. Both sculptors of the Berenike statuettes decided to provide the hems with zigzag folds, thereby following Greco-Roman ›classical‹ habits. But they diverged in other approaches. The sculptor of the marble statuette, who had simplified the drapery on its back, also chose an easy solution for the gesture of the left hand by

118 Luczanits 2008, no. 131.

119 See a Gandharan Buddha rendered in ›western‹ workmanship in the Metropolitan Museum: Carter 1988; Behrendt 2007, 48–51 no. 39 frontispiece and 2 illustrations.

providing it with a separate kerchief[120] (Fig. 24. 35). The sculptor of the small statuette, who rendered the drapery of the *saṅghāṭi* correctly on the back, tried to make it very clear how a hand grips a piece of cloth near the hem and lifts it up so that the cloth protrudes above the hand. Below this, the two parts of the lifted hem that fall down in zigzag folds connect directly under the hand with a horizontal part of the hem (Fig. 34). This works well with an external hand gripping the cloth. It is impossible, however, if the hand protrudes from under the same garment that it holds. At most, the hand could hold the cloth in this way from the inside, which it does not do. This may indicate that both sculptors had a similar model, where the *gestus* of the left hand was especially unclear. Alternatively, it might show that this motif was generally difficult to understand for non-Gandharans or non-Indians (see below § 82).



36

Fig. 36: Lotus flower next to bare foot of marble Buddha statuette

A Singular Attribute: the Flower on the Marble Buddha's Support

66 Next to the supporting leg of the marble figure, a plant sprouts from the pedestal (Fig. 36). The stalk extends in a straight line comprising three shafts, and »a relatively large, chalice-shaped flower with almond-shaped petals blossoms from the bead of the receptacle«. M. Stoye recognized that, in a representation of Buddha, this must be a lotus flower[121]: »Like a lotus, the long stem rises straight up to knee height. The shape of the petals and size of the calyx in relation to the figure of the Buddha also support this identification.«[122] In Buddhist tradition, the lotus symbolizes purity of the enlightened mind from which all contaminations run off, just like brackish water from the lotus. There are several passages in ancient Buddhist literature which compare the enlightened mind to the lotus, such as in the *Pali Canon*, an old collection of teachings of the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama. »In the *Doṇasutta* (*Aṅguttaranikāya* 4, 36), the Buddha explains to a Brahmin named Doṇa: ›as a lovely lotus is not soiled by the water, I am not soiled by the world: therefore, oh Brahmin, I am a Buddha‹. And in the same Sutta: ›Just as a blue, red, or white lotus flower, though born in the water and grown up in the water, rises above the water and stands unsoiled by the water, even so, though born in the world and grown up in the world, I have overcome the world and dwell unsoiled by the world. Remember, me, Brahmin, as a Buddha.‹«[123]

67 Stoye states further that, if Gandharan art is taken as its reference, the artistic solution pursued by juxtaposing Buddha with the lotus is unique. In Gandhara, some examples combine Buddha with a lotus base. However, the lotus is never added to a Buddha image as an attribute, as it is in the Berenike example. »In Gandharan imagery the lotus […] is mainly associated with Bodhisattvas, beings whose minds are already

120 This is a motif that is rarely used – for women only – in the Roman imperial period in Asia Minor and in Late Antiquity: Bergmann 1999, 65 with n. 439. 440.

121 The text on the lotus as well as the remarks about the Indian nimbus and the first part of the text on the curly hair-type of Buddha are taken from Stoye's oral presentation on the marble statuette at the colloquium »Gandharan Art in its Buddhist Context«, Classical Art Centre, Oxford, March 23, 2022 (Stoye 2022), https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/gandharaConnections/webcasts 06.05.2025). For the relevant presentation navigate to »Session 5« under »Gandharan Art in its Buddhist Context: international workshop«. *Verbatim* citations of Stoye's presentation are preserved in quotation marks.

122 For the differences between the white and blue Egyptian lotus varieties (*nymphaea lotus* and *nymphaea caerulea*) and the use and representations of the broader-petalled Indian *nelumbo nucifera* in Pharaonic, Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, see Germer 1985, 37–40; La Rocca 2021, 117–132.

123 Translated by Bodhi 2012, 426. This is almost identical to passages found in the *Bāhunasutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* 10, 81 (translated by Bodhi 2012, 1440 f.) and in the *Pupphasutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* 22, 94.

capable of enlightenment, but who postpone their own attainment for the benefit of others. However, even with Bodhisattvas, the lotus attribute is never attached to the corresponding pedestal.« Gandharan Bodhisattvas hold the lotus in one hand, sometimes as a flower held upwards, sometimes hanging downwards. For the Berenike piece, familiarity with the lotus metaphor used by Indian Buddhists may be assumed, but its visual realization was not based on Gandharan models.

The Marble Buddha Head

68 The marble Buddha head (Fig. 22. 37. 41) has a nimbus, elongated ears and hair with a topknot (*uṣṇīṣa*), but the hair does not consist of the slightly wavy strands frequent in Gandhara or on the gypsum Buddha's head from Berenike (Fig. 13. 14). Rather, it is made of regular, tightly packed, ring-shaped curls with a drilled hole in the middle (resembling *tortellini*). The style of the face is Greco-Roman, and it is remarkably youthful. The middle of the face and protruding parts of the eyes and eyebrows were damaged when the head fell or was dragged forward after being broken away from the body. The left eyeball, however, is sufficiently preserved to indicate that it did not have an incised pupil[124].

The Nimbus, the Indian Tradition of Its Meaning and Form

69 A nimbus is standard on Indian Buddha images. On the Berenike Buddha, it comprises a smooth, circular disc depicting 14 rays in low relief shaped like elongated triangles with middle ribs emanating from the head. M. Stoye comments that »when the Buddha's appearance is described in ancient Buddhist tales, a golden radiance, a supernatural glow emanating from the body of the Exalted One is often praised. This brilliance is even explicitly derived from the pure mind of the Enlightened One. Thus, in the first book of the *Mahāvastu*, Mahākāśyapa and Mahākātyāyana talk about the virtues of the Buddhas and say: ›He [the man of vision] dispels doubt and perplexity, and that is why cool radiance, like shafts of light, emanates from his body‹.[125] Further on, Vāgīśa praises the Buddha: ›Homage to thee, oh Buddha, who [...] bearest the hundred marks of merit. [...] Clean and perfectly pure, thou art all aglow like a fire on a mountain top. In steadiness of mind thou hast reached perfection. [...] As the glorious sun shines in the sky, and the full moon, when the sky is clear, so dost thou, O Man, firm in concentration, shine forth like burnished gold‹.[126] In a way, this supernatural splendor represents a counterpart to the lotus metaphor, since both images underline and visualize the spiritual perfection of the Buddha. In connection with his radiance, the Buddha is often compared to the sun. In light of this, the design of the nimbus surrounding the head of the Berenike Buddha is not surprising.«

70 Nevertheless, the 14 triangular rays in bas-relief do not correspond to standardized nimbus forms known from Gandharan art. The basic form is a smooth, large-diameter nimbus that usually appears undecorated (Fig. 26. 27. 28). However, some examples preserve paint, indicating that the nimbus may have borne painted rays[127].

71 Then there are nimbus forms with carved rays, but these differ from the Berenike Buddha. Usually, only the outer rim bears rays (Fig. 38)[128]; sometimes, the spikes mutate into lotus leaves, sometimes beams resemble wrought iron fence spikes. There

124 This was confirmed during a visit to the Suez Canal Museum in Ismailiya in February 2025. For the possible relevance of this for the date of the head, see § 49.

125 Jones 1949–1956, I 128.

126 Jones 1949–1956, I 129 f.; cf. the remarks on gilding above § 47.

127 Kurita 1990, figs. 192. 193.

128 See n. 131 below.

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is one exception of a nimbus with long triangular rays; however, it is a Bodhisattva, not a Buddha[129]. The presence of a nimbus on the Berenike head, therefore, corresponds to the basic Indian requirements for a Buddha image, but the execution with large, triangular, carved rays is unusual in Gandhara.

39

The Nimbus in the Greco-Roman Tradition and in Roman Egypt

72 For the Roman-period sculptor commissioned to make the statuette of the marble Buddha, the combination of a nimbus and rays was completely normal. In this tradition, they expressed basically two different aspects of luminosity: the nimbus expressed a general luminosity with connotations of superhuman qualities or even (though not always) divinity, while the rays expressed the extra luminosity of the sun or astral qualities. Rays could also be used separately or combined with a nimbus for the sun and for sunlike or astral beings[130]. Thus, the nimbus of the Berenike Buddha could indicate two different aspects, luminosity/purity and comparability to the sun, in complete correspondence with the written sources.

73 A three-dimensional stone nimbus was, however, a foreign concept for the sculptor of the Berenike Buddha. The Greco-Roman tradition represented nimbi in paint and relief but not in the same three-dimensional way as bodies. From this same tradition derived, not the religious concepts but the way of combining nimbi and rays in Palmyra, Hatra and even – basically – Kushan art[131], as well as in Roman Egypt, as,

Fig. 37: Ring-shaped curls with additional drill-holes in the ›digons‹ on nimbed head of marble Buddha

Fig. 38: Gandharan Buddha with snail shell curls and with rays on outer rim of nimbus. Private collection

Fig. 39: Terracotta relief of solar crocodile god from Fayum. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ägyptisches Museum

129 Kurita 1990, fig. 148; cf. the Bodhisattvas figs. 149. 273. The bronze statuette in the Metropolitan Museum with a ›rayed‹ nimbus (above n. 119) may be set aside for the moment.

130 Keyssner 1936; Bergmann 1998, 40–57.

131 For Palmyra and Hatra, see al-Salihi 2021, 9 fig. 4. The nimbi and rays in the Kushan coinage of course express culture-specific ideas, too, but their formal use on coins follows Greco-Roman habits: simple nimbi

for example, in the terracotta relief of a solar crocodile-god from the Fayum (Fig. 39)[132]. Yet, Hellenistic and Roman art could represent the light emanating from astral and solar gods and rulers in three-dimensional images by inserting (gilded) bronze rays into marble or bronze heads[133]. In producing a three-dimensional stone nimbus, the sculptor of the marble statuette followed an Indian model or verbal instructions, as in the case of the lotus.

Buddha's Curly Hair

74 A hairstyle of tightly packed curls on the head and topknot was widespread among freestanding Buddhas in India: from the late second/early third century on in Mathura, an important artistic center in central India (see below § 83); in the Deccan and Andhra in ca. A.D. 200 to the sixth century, beginning with the first local representation of Buddha in human form in Amaravati/Andhra probably in the late second century A.D.[134]; and in the Gupta empire (fourth – late sixth centuries A.D.) and beyond. The curls could have the form of snail shells (also simplified as balls) or, in Andhra, of flat rope-coils.

Buddha's Curly Hair in Gandhara

75 In Gandhara, this curly hair style appeared in the form of snail-shell curls sometime ›late‹ (Fig. 38)[135], after a long predominance of straight or wavy strands of hair[136]. According to prevailing scholarly opinion, it was adopted from Mathura. At Mathura changes in the hairstyles of Bodhisattva and Buddha figures can be traced rather clearly in a series of dated images. This indicates that the curls may have been introduced between A.D. 178 and 239[137] and, thence, received in Gandhara. Against this Stoye remarks: »However, it may be underlined that Buddhas, which are now thought to have been made around 100 CE or early in the second century CE, already have snail-shell curls, not on their heads, but on their *uṣṇīṣa.*«[138] And the same has been observed on the figure of Buddha on the above-mentioned gold coins of Kanishka I (Fig. 30)[139]. »Thus, snail-shell curls were already to some extent part of the repertoire of Gandharan artists before they eventually covered entire Buddha heads.«

for rulers and certain deities and nimbi plus distinct rays, which, however, are added to the outer contour of the nimbus-zone, for the sun gods Helios and Miiro, sometimes for Nana and some other astral goddesses: Spagnoli (revised English version of Spagnoli 2002) accessible at https://www.academia.edu/38849308/Tracking_the_Origin_of_the_Gandharan_Nimbus (12.05.2025). Spagnoli had to deal with heterogeneous ideas about the use of the nimbus and rays in the Greco-Roman tradition in the older literature. Bergmann 1998 aligns more with her conclusions for the nimbus on Gandharan coins.

132 Weber 1914, 142 no. 213 pl. 21; Tallet 2021, II 1016 C5.3; 1110 C5.3, cf. C5.2. In Roman Egypt, the combination of nimbus and rays is nearly ubiquitous because so many gods have solar aspects (Tallet 2021); for others, Tallet sees an assimilation to the rayed crown of the Roman emperors, which cannot be discussed here. An exception to the rule that nimbi in the Greco-Roman world were not represented three-dimensionally are terracotta statuettes of Harpokrates in Roman Egypt. Sometimes the context is the statuette sitting on a lotus and combined with further accessories, so that it is between a relief and a three-dimensional object. In other cases, the nimbus may be used like one of Harpokrates' numerous crowns: Tallet 2021, I cover; II 1091 B3.2; 1092–1098, all besides B3.8; B3.9; B3.12–13; a similarly nimbed limestone bust of Horus in Cairo (Tallet 2021, II 998 f. cat. C1.1; 1101 C1.1) is not a normal sculpture but interpreted as an apparatus for giving oracles.

133 Bergmann 1998, pls. 24; 44, 3–5; 47, 2. 3; 48, 2. 3; 55, 1–3.

134 Shimada 2013, 102–104.

135 Private collection (Kurita 1990, 94 fig. 237).

136 Stoye 2022; cf. above § 1.

137 On the chronology of the ›*kapardin*‹-type understood as Buddha, cf. Härtel 1985; but see, for the change from ›*kapardin*‹- (= Bodhisattva?)-type to Buddha at Mathura, Falk 2012, 491–517; a Buddha from Anyor dated to year 51 of the Kanishka era = A.D. 178: van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949, 196–198 (with obsolete era-date) figs. 39. 40, wearing short sickle-shaped hair in superimposed rows; Jina from the year 12 = 112 of the Kanishka era = A.D. 239, with small rope-coil-curls: van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949, 237–241 fig. 56; dating of the Kanishka era to A.D. 127: cf. above § 58.

138 Head in Berlin: Bild des Buddha 1979, 76 f. no. 7; Tanabe 1987, 142 type 2 fig. 14 with comparisons.

139 Above § 60.

Ring-Shaped Curls in the Swat Valley

76 Without prejudging lines of dependence, further research on the introduction of curly hair for Buddha should take note of the popularity of curly hair as a fashion and its representation as ring-shaped curls in the Swat Valley. Material from Saidu Sharif and Butkara I, whose earliest reliefs the excavators date to the mid-first century A.D.[140], shows that curly hair was well-known, and that curls in reliefs and related genera were always ring-shaped. They occur in different hairstyles: long hair ending in these curls or heads full of curls made from shorter hair (Fig. 40)[141], the fluffy hair of ›Parthian‹ male hairstyles, the very short and curly hair plus curly topknot of an athlete, curly topknots combined with straight main hair and even some curls showing from below a turban[142]. Often, though not always, a drill-hole accentuates the center of the ring-shaped curls[143]. Four small heads and one complete figure of Buddha in relief from Butkara I depict hair in ring-shaped curls on both the head and the topknot[144]. These, however, are not early sculptures from Butkara I, which are characterized by wide-open eyes and streaked hair[145], but have eyes with broad, half-closed lids[146]. Their (most probably later) date could be helpful for the question discussed here. Also, it seems possible that ring-shaped curls were used for some time on small formats, whereas the more differentiated snail-shell curls primarily appeared on larger formats.

40

Fig. 40: Ring-shaped curls (without drilling in the ›digons‹) on a relief fragment from Butkara I, Pakistan

A Special Sculptural Formula and the Date of the Head of the Marble Buddha

77 Whatever the exact look of his Gandharan or Indian model's curly hair, the Berenike sculptor represented the curls as ring-shaped with a drill-hole in the middle of each of them and enriched the ensemble by adding another drill-hole in every interstice or ›digon‹ between the curls (Fig. 22 left; 37. 41). This special formula dates the head probably to ca. A.D. 90–140.

78 The sculptor adopted the formula from representations that had been established for the *toupé* hairstyles fashionable for women, and less so for men, in the Roman world in the late first/earlier second century A.D. Roman empresses wore them between A.D. 80 and 96[147], while non-imperial women retained the fashion until A.D. 140 at the latest. Examples include grave monuments datable to the time of Trajan (98–117) and Hadrian (117–138)[148]. Ring-shaped curls and drilled holes in the ›digons‹ are ubiquitous

140 For the date of the Great *Stūpa*, phase 3 of Butkara I: Faccenna et al. 2003, 283–286; cf. Faccenna 2007 for both places; material from Butkara I: Faccenna 1962 (= Butkara I, pl. 2); material from Saidu Sharif: Faccenna 2001; for Saidu Sharif most recently: Olivieri 2022.

141 Faccenna 1962, 52 inv. 1248 pl. 191.

142 Saidu Sharif and related places: Faccenna 2001, pls. 22. 24. 50. 51. 82 b; 83 b; 87 a; 93 c (!); 113 a; 114. 115 a; 120 a; 139 d; 141 a; Khan 1997, 76; Butkara I and related places: Faccenna 1962, pls. 20 a; 25. 29. 84–86. 191 (here Fig. 40). 283. 284. 286; Faccenna 1964, pls. 414. 416. 480. 599–601; furthermore: Luczanits 2008, 271 no. 191; 300 fig. 4; 323 no. 217; Khan 1997, pl. 76, 4; cf. especially the relief from Buner (?) in Toronto: Rosenfield 1967, frontispiece and p. 217; Kurita 1990, 212 no. 620; Olivieri 2022.

143 On the knowledge and use of the drill in the Swat Valley: Brancaccio – Olivieri 2019.

144 Faccenna 1962, 75 no. 3223 (h. 8 cm); 75 no. 965 pl. 298 a. b (h. with neck 17 cm); 82 no. 2668 (h. 11 cm); 82 no. 4378 pl. 323 a. b (h. 10 cm).

145 See n. 162; Fabrègues 1987.

146 As especially Rhi's type 3: Rhi 2008, 57–63.

147 Flavian empresses: Daltrop et al. 1966, pls. 42–59 (identifications mostly debated); ring-shaped curls with drilled holes: Daltrop et al. 1966, pls. 43; 46 a; 55. 56, but rarely with regular drillings in the ›digons‹; there are three marble portraits with this hair fashion from Egypt, cf. n. 151.

148 Combination of women with toupé hairstyles and men with hairstyles of Trajan: examples cited in Fittschen – Zanker 1983, 50 f. no. 64; Daltrop 1980, 85 f. pl. 25, 1. 2; d'Ambra 1995, 680 fig. 14; Fittschen – Zanker 2014, 104 f. no. 107 pls. 112. 113; de Kersauson 1996, 54 no. 17; Kockel 1993, 208 no. N5 pl. 121 d; combination of frontal toupé with the empress Sabina's hair nest on the back of the head: Buccino 2017, 239–247.

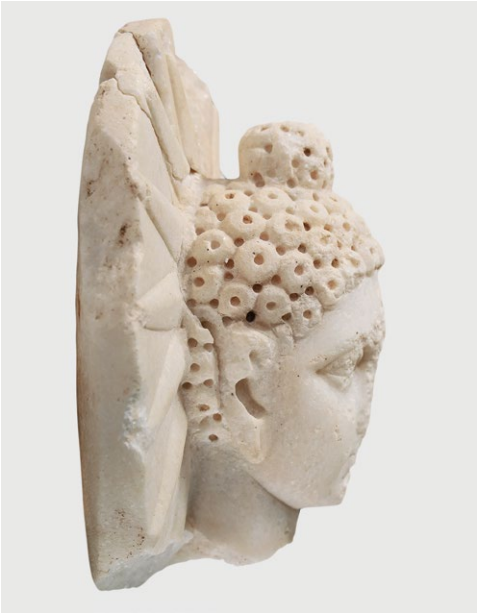

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Fig. 41: Curls on nimbed marble head of marble Buddha

on three-dimensional female portraits of that period (Fig. 42. 43. 44)[149]. Ring-shaped curls with a drill-hole in the center alone, but not in the ›digon‹, appear in sculpture in Italy and the wider Roman Empire in different contexts and periods[150] and are unsuitable to prove chronological or workshop connections. The additional drilled holes in the ›digons‹ are, however, specific. In the Roman provinces, the female toupé hairstyle was also popular, especially in Egypt, but its sculptural formula with the added drill holes in the ›digons‹ was less so[151]. Painted mummy portraits and stucco masks also depict the hair fashion but did not allow drill holes as decorative elements[152]. One eastern example displaying the technique with ring-shaped curls and drill holes in the ›digons‹ is a Hadrianic portrait of high quality from Nicomedia made from Proconnesian marble (Fig. 44)[153].

79 Men wore a variety of more-or-less curly hairstyles in the period discussed here, including tightly packed curls above their foreheads[154], but the formula in question was rarely used[155]. For a short period, however, even the elaborate hairstyles of youthful male attendants at state sacrifices adopted this fashion and technique. Dated examples appear on the arches of Titus in Rome (after A.D. 81) and Trajan at Beneventum (A.D. 114)[156].

80 In sum, the schema concerned not only a hair fashion and its representation but was also a temporally limited sculpting fashion used for high quality objects. It was typical of Rome and Italy but rarer elsewhere. It is probable that the sculptor of the Berenike Buddha knew this formula, perhaps from Alexandria (see below § 89–90), and that he embellished the Buddha's curly hair when the formula was fashionable, i. e., in ca. A.D. 90–140. Of course, it is possible that he revived the formula later, but that is less probable because it was special and not one known to have made a later resurgence[157]. Also, the age that the sculptor would have had to reach to be

149 Women: e. g. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano: Felletti Maj 1953, 87 f. no. 158; Buccino 2017, 17 f. figs. 24. 25; St. Petersburg, Hermitage: Vostchinina 1974, 156 f. no. 29 pl. 41; Buccino 2017, 20 fig. 28; cf. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek: Johansen 1995, 50 no. 14 and many others.

150 Harmodios: Giuliano 1995, 3 f. no. 1; hair with irregular drillings between the curls of a man in a clipeus of a sarcophagus of the third century A.D., Giuliano 1995, 16–19 no. 18; putti on sarcophagi: Kranz 1999, pls. 26–29. 35; 39, 1.

151 No drill work: Inan – Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979, 329–331 nos. 328. 329 pl. 237; few drill-points: Smith 2006, 207–211 nos. 89. 90 pls. 69–71; Egypt, marble: Athens, ex Dimitriou collection: Rodenwaldt 1928, 210–213 figs. 2. 3; Kansas City: Jucker 1961, 83 f. cat. St 26 pl. 32; London, V&A Museum: Grimm 1974, 77 pl. 74, 1. 2; for a unique example with the techniques in Greece: von Moock 1998, 165 no. 428 pl. 57.

152 Flavian hairstyle in painted mummy portraits: Borg 1996, pls. 9; 16, 1; 42, 2; 56, 1; 57, 1; in mummy masks: Müller 2021, pls. 8, 1; 19, 1. 3; 25, 2; p. 301, Beleglisten 44. 45 (74 examples).

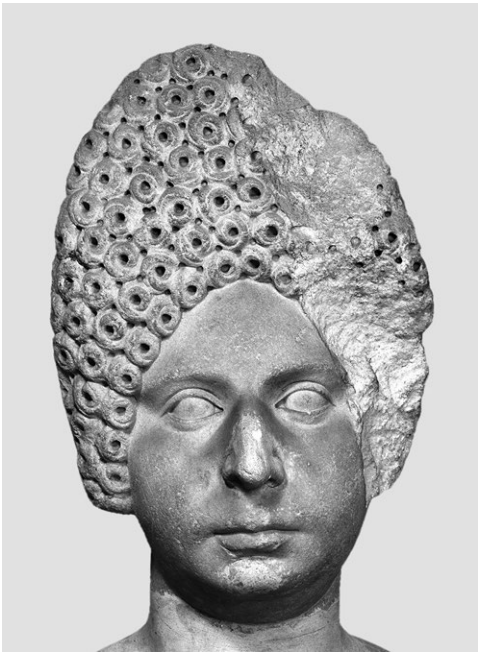
153 Özgan 2013, 118 fig. 130 a. b; its classicizing eyes point to the Hadrianic period, and one might take it as an example of the Nicomedian sculpture ›school‹ working in Proconnesian marble, as was once postulated by J. B. Ward-Perkins (but criticized since then; for both opinions see the second and revised edition of his articles on marbles above n. 98). But in the region of the Sea of Marmara Proconnesian marble was used since the sixth century B.C. (Reinsberg 2022), later in the Pergamon Altar, the Stoa of Eumenes at Athens, etc. (list of early examples in Bald Romano et al. 2018, 272); it appears during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96) for imperial monuments in Campania and Rome (Bald Romano et al. 2018). Otherwise, there is little known about the production of sculpture at Nicomedia before the recently found splendid Tetrarchic reliefs (Ağtürk 2021).

154 For Titus and Domitian: Wolsfeld 2021; Nerva: Bergmann – Zanker 1981, 380–410; non-imperial male portraiture: Cain 1993; men: Cain 1993, 70–73 (examples), 88–95 (interpretation); Trillmich 1982 pls. 22, 1–3; 23, 2–4; 24, 1, but cf. Bol 1994, 222 f. no. 514 (R. Amedick); Wrede 1981, 277 f. no. 216 pl. 32, 2; Fittschen 2001; cf. a head of Odysseus in Copenhagen, which shows the predilection of the decorative use of single drill holes: Moltesen 2002, 264 no. 84.

155 Grave relief in Warsaw: Trillmich 1982, pl. 23, 4; early Hadrianic bust from Puteoli in Castello di Baiae: Gialanella 2000, 57 f.

156 Pfanner 1983, pls. 61; 62, 4; Rotili 1972, pls. 28. 31; Fless 1995, 42 f. pls. 18, 2; 22, 1; 23, 1; 34, 1. 2; 35, 1 and the later multiplum pl. 23, 2 – but representations like these probably existed in Egypt, if at all, only in painting.

157 The latest case of a portrait with this formula is a relief in Rome, Museo Nazionale delle Terme: Kockel 1993, 209 f. no. 9 pls. 123 b; 124, which combines two older pairs and one younger woman. One woman wears a hairstyle of ca. 150–160, one from around the twenties of the second century and an old woman has the toupé of curls with pronounced drill-holes in the ›digons‹. This does not prove that the formula was still



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still active 30 or 40 years later, when curly hair is thought to have become common for Buddha, is unlikely given average ancient life expectancy[158].

81 The date offered here for the marble Berenike Buddha does not correspond to some common ideas about the development of the image of Buddha in Gandhara and Mathura. However, the still restricted number of fixed dates in this field and the iconography attested by the BODDO coins of ca. A.D. 150 may make it worthwhile to see if the proposed date of the Berenike Buddha contributes to further insights.

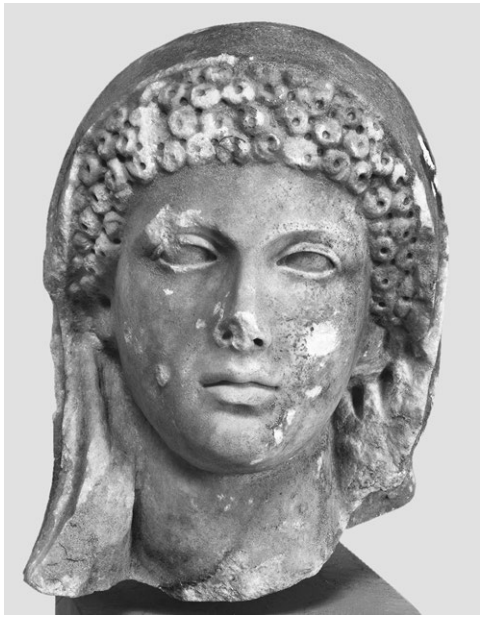

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Fig. 42: Post-Flavian female portrait with toupé hairstyle and ring-shaped curls with additional drillings in the ›digons‹. Rome, Museo Nazionale delle Terme

Fig. 43: Post-Flavian female portrait with toupé hairstyle and ring-shaped curls with additional drillings in the ›digons‹. St. Petersburg, Hermitage

Fig. 44: Post-Flavian female portrait with toupé hairstyle and ring-shaped curls with additional drillings in the ›digons‹. Izmit Museum

Models for the Marble Buddha

82 Returning to the question of possible models for the two statuettes of Buddha: as indicated above, both bodies correspond to the main Gandharan type of a standing Buddha in terms of clothing, drapery, posture, and gestures. They closely parallel one another as the left hand of each raises the hem of his *saṅghāṭi*, gripping a bunch of cloth at waist level and holding it in front like a bouquet of flowers, a similar gesture appearing, above all, in the BODDO gold coins of Kanishka I (Fig. 30). Each has worked-out back sides, with correct or simplified

alive in the second half of the second century, but, following a general rule pronounced by Kockel 1993, 48 f., the portraits in this genus of grave reliefs reflected generational differences and cited older styles, in this case, besides the hairstyles, also the different forms of busts, which all changed with time. The striking strength of the drill-holes on the front and some of the pupil details are the result of a slight reworking of the weathered relief in post-antique times.

158 For Roman Egypt: Bagnall – Frier 1994.

draping of the *saṅghāṭi.* They differ, however, in two respects from Gandharan models and from one another: in the treatment of the garment on the front and in the left hand's gesture (above § 63–65). Taken together, these features seem to lead to the conclusion that the bodies relied on the same or similar painted or drawn models, which required independent interpretations by the sculptors for the design of volumes and made it difficult to understand the gesture of the left hand. The use of preliminary drawings or ›cartoons‹ for reliefs at Saidu Sharif and their transfer to Miran in the Tarim Basin has been observed[159]. Also the Chinese monk Yi Jing, who visited India in the seventh century A.D., explicitly recommended such images for journeys, saying that it was »the duty of monks and laymen in India […] to print [images] on silk or paper to be worshiped wherever one goes«[160]. Thus, travellers surely brought them along. However, this explanation of the different elaboration of fabric and folds of the garments on the fronts of the two Buddha bodies is not self-evident, since, normally, sculptors of the Roman imperial period were skilled in exact copying, especially of linear systems, which the Gandharan Buddha bodies possess, but not in free interpretation. They evidently preferred more expressive solutions here. That both bodies have well-executed backs (Fig. 20. 21), on the other hand, does not necessarily contradict this idea. The draping of the *saṅghāṭi* corresponds to that of the Greek himation, as back views on reliefs demonstrate[161], and could easily be created by the sculptors, whereas the lotus and probably the rays of the nimbus must go back to oral instructions from the patron. If a painted model was the source, the reproduction of the nimbus in stone would also have had to be expressly requested. Alternatively, statuettes, possibly of wood, may have served as models.

83 It seems clear that the sculptor of the small Buddha reformulated a Gandharan model according to Greco-Roman taste. But what about the regular garment folds of the marble Buddha? Were they copied from another, less ›classical‹, Gandharan model? Early sculptures in the Swat Valley with related stylizations seem to be too early and simple to have been an inspiration[162]. Another possibility comes from Mathura, which had a centuries-long tradition of depicting folds as parallel incised lines. However, Mathura began to adopt the standing Buddha developed in Gandhara only in the later second century A.D.[163].

84 Furthermore, we should ask if idiosyncrasies of the marble Buddha could trace back to modified Gandharan forms from areas more directly connected than Gandhara to maritime trade between India and the Mediterranean, like the Deccan and Gujarat, especially the port of Barygaza. The *PME* highlights the importance of these places, also reflected in numerous inscriptions of Indian seafarers left in the Hoq Cave on Socotra Island and now demonstrated by the Berenike stele too (see below § 116). These sources also show the dissemination of Buddhism among the traders and seafarers.

85 Also, the general situation may have been favorable to such a supposition. Intense contact existed at various levels between the Deccan and Gandhara, the Western Kshatrapa and the Kushan dynasty[164]. However, there is little evidence of representations of Buddha in human form in that region before A.D. 200[165]; many of them, in cave-sanctuaries of the Deccan, appear only in the fourth/fifth centuries[166] and follow other typological traditions. In Gujarat, Devni Mori, the only *stūpa* thus far identified as

159 Olivieri 2022, 181–185, cf. the important painting from Kizil in the Tarim Basin: Olivieri 2022, 185 fig. 69.

160 Yijing 2000, 137.

161 Luczanits 2008, 233 no. 178; above n. 102.

162 Faccenna 1962, pl. 214 and related objects; for the (later?) standing Buddha, cf. Faccenna 1962, pls. 74–78, which have steep, not gradual, curves of folds.

163 Cf. the standing Buddha: van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949, 187 f. pls. 22. 36; Asthana – Yaldiz 1992, 89 no. 43.

164 Brancaccio 2014; Ishikawa 2020; cf. above § 29.

165 An exception seems to be the small and rather illegible relief figures of Buddhas at Kanheri 3, dated to A.D. 172, 188 or 192, »the earliest in Western India«: Leese 1979.

166 Brancaccio 2013, 9.

45

46

Fig. 45: Large standing Buddha figure at stūpa of Kanaganahalli, Deccan, front view

Fig. 46: Large standing Buddha figure at stūpa of Kanaganahalli, Deccan, three-quarter view

containing statues of Buddha, has strong Gandharan elements but was also built and adorned with the statues only in the late fourth century[167]. In Andhra, Buddha images in human form appear only from ca. A.D. 200 onwards, first in Amaravati[168]. The marble Buddha from Berenike seems clearly earlier than these.

86 Possible exceptions are the two large standing Buddha figures from Kanaganahalli, probably part of a series, which includes ten sitting Buddha figures added to the *stūpa* at an unknown time after the erection of an outer railing in A.D. 131[169]. Their curly hair and the parallel arched folds from the *saṅghāṭi*'s hem to neck, especially of one of them (Fig. 45. 46), seem comparable to the marble Berenike Buddha. Other factors, however, argue against a possible relationship, for they have some conspicuous characteristics of the Buddha types of Andhra, which the marble Buddha from Berenike lacks. Since their introduction in Amaravati and for centuries thereafter, standing Buddha figures, both in-the-round and in relief, mostly appear with only the left shoulder covered by the *saṅghāṭi* and the left arm raising the *saṅghāṭi*'s seam up to or above shoulder height while letting the edge of the mantle fall vertically in a single mass down the left side of the body. This also occurs in rarer representations, where the *saṅghāṭi* covers both shoulders[170]. In this and other details, which need further documentation,

167 Ishikawa 2020, 164–168.

168 See n. 134.

169 Poonacha 2011, standing Buddha figures: 326–328 pls. 29 a. b; 32 b; 126 a. b; sitting Buddha figures: 328–334 pls. 127. 128; inscription of the railing: Nakanishi – von Hinüber 2014, 34 f.; cf. for dating: Arlt – Zin 2021.

170 Amaravati: Shimada – Willis 2016, 34 fig. 28 (both versions); 71 fig. 96; Nagarjunakonda, one shoulder: Rao 1956, pl. 7, 10 (left hand resting on *saṅghāṭi*); Rama 1994, pl. 82; both shoulders: Rama 1994, pl. 18, 26 cf. pl. 18, 29 (no Buddha); Asthana – Yaldiz 1992, 65 f. no. 16; Phanigiri: Ahuja 2021, 24 f.; cf. examples with both covered shoulders from Guntupalle (possibly after A.D. 300) and Goli: Shimada 2013, 70–73 figs. 16. 17. Cf. also the examples in Guy 2023, 202 fig. 107 (Amaravati); 234 fig. 115; 237 fig. 118 (Goli); 241 fig. 121

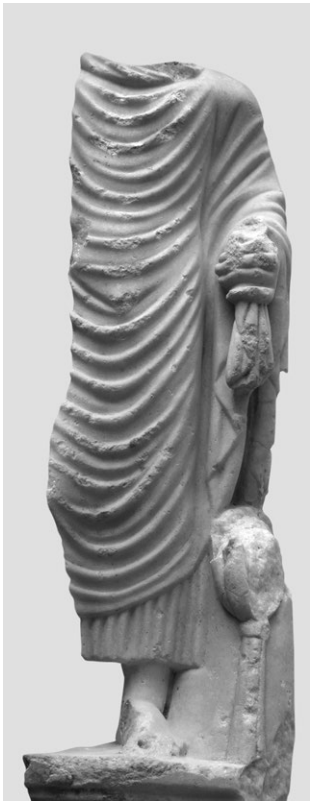

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Fig. 47: Linear folds on garment of marble Buddha statuette

Fig. 48: Palmyrene funerary relief showing linear style of folds on garment. Damascus, National Museum

the standing Buddhas in Kanaganahalli may be associated with them and differ from the Berenike marble Buddha.

87 If the areas of the Western Kshatrapas and Satavahanas were not (according to present knowledge) the origin of the model, the sculptor may have taken inspiration for the detailed design of the folds on the figure's front from a completely different sculptural tradition. Compared to most Gandharan-Indian sculptures, the drapery folds of the marble Berenike statuette – parallel, equidistant, uniform with mostly symmetrical curves – are even more regular than those of the Kanaganahalli and the Gandharan Buddha-statues, not only because the curved folds run all over the body, but also because all drapery folds adhere to the same form and volume and the folds and intermediate spaces have the same width. This creates a very special decorative effect, which has only one real parallel: the style of Parthian and Palmyrene sculptures[171]. The Palmyrenes were heavily involved in the caravan and Red Sea trade, and had their own *funduq* in Koptos and a sanctuary in Berenike[172]. The sculptor of the marble Buddha may have taken his interpretation of the linear style of a Gandharan model from some Palmyrene images (cf. Fig. 47. 48)[173].

Place of Production of the Marble Buddha

88 The gypsum Buddha head and related pieces from the same workshop (Fig. 13. 15. 16. 17) were made at Berenike. Also, the smaller headless statuette, if indeed

(Nagarjunakonda); 267 f. figs. 140. 141 (Alluru; unknown provenience); 271 fig. 143 (Nelakondapalli). I thank M. Zin for information and for showing me some of her material.

171 Ghirshman 1962, 88 fig. 99 (Shami). Cf. the numerous recent publications of the Palmyra Portrait Project, edited by Rubina Raja, see https://projects.au.dk/palmyraportrait/ (12.05.2025).

172 Sidebotham 2011, 74. 153 f. 211 f.; Evers 2017, 129–131.

173 Ghirshman 1962, 68 fig. 81.

made of gypsum, may have been produced in Berenike (Fig. 20), although its quality of workmanship seems exceptional and, if locally produced, it must have been carved by a sculptor who worked there only occasionally.

89 The same is likely for the marble statuette. In Egypt, Alexandria was the main center for sculpture made from imported marbles. It is not known if there were any permanent marble sculptors' *ateliers* in Roman Egypt outside of Alexandria. Marble sculptures found elsewhere in Roman Egypt, including Berenike, may have been imported from Alexandria. Alternatively, sculptors from Alexandria could have travelled to execute larger orders and brought the stone with them. There are, for instance, marble sculptures found in Thebes in Upper Egypt, which were surely made by sculptors from Alexandrian workshops[174].

90 Thus, it is possible that the rather rare fragments of votive marble sculptures found at Berenike, at least those in small formats and standard types[175], were imported from Alexandria or the Nile Valley[176]. If not for its special theme, the marble statuette of Buddha might also have been imported as a finished product from Alexandria, but its theme and special features, like the standing lotus, speak for its production in contact with the commissioner at Berenike[177]. For life-sized marble statues[178], danger of breakage may have compelled sculptors to transport their raw materials to Berenike to carve the images there. More generally, highly qualified craftsmen may have traveled seasonally to Berenike for periods of high activity in sync with the monsoons. This can be deduced from some high-quality statues and fragments in local anhydritic gypsum[179]. Also, the Koptos Tariff, an inscription from A.D. 90 listing charges imposed on travelers and goods moving on roads between Koptos and Berenike or Myos Hormos, mentions a craftsman/artist (χειροτέχνης)[180]. A fragmentary list of merchants and craftsmen active at Berenike for five months mentions two χρυσόχεις (gilders or goldsmiths) for the first three months, one for the next month and none for the last month; possibly they stayed seasonally for different periods of time[181].

An Indian Inscription from Berenike

by Rodney Ast – Shailendra Bhandare – Ingo Strauch

91 A stele inscribed with five lines of text, three in Sanskrit and two in Greek, was found very near the marble Buddha head in the Isis temple courtyard in 2022 (Fig. 49). The proximity of the two suggests that they were on display near each other for at least

174 Head of the emperor Severus Alexander from Luxor: Wiggers – Wegner 1971, 187 pl. 51; this and other pieces from the same workshop: Bergmann 1977, 171–173 pls. 51. 52; funerary reliefs of members of the legio stationed at Nikopolis near Alexandria, with portraits from this workshop: Waebens 2012; marble statue probably of a priestess in Luxor: Luxor Museum 1981, 188 f. no. 293 fig. 155; cf. two statues from Alexandria, Abu el Nawatir: Breccia 1932, pl. 40, 145 = Tkaczow 1993, 259 no. 202 with ill.; Tkaczow 1993, 259 no. 203 = Graindor n. d., fig. 9. All three statues have a height, without the missing head, of 1,20–1,30 m.

175 Mostly still unpublished, see Sidebotham et al. 2019, pls. 24, 4; 25, 1 and the small alabaster head of Sarapis Sidebotham et al. 2019, pl. 21, 2.

176 Cf. the ›agalmata‹ – small cult images of Egyptian type (golden or gilded) or Greek ones of unknown size and material transported to the ›stathmos‹ of Bi'r Samut on the Edfu–Berenike road in the second half of the third century B.C.: Cuvigny 2023, especially 288–292.

177 The much-discussed idea that there were Buddhist congregations at or near Alexandria is refuted by Strauch 2019, 37–46.

178 There survives a plinth and lower part of a nearly life-sized female marble statue at Berenike (BE18-111/029/020), as well as a life-sized female marble leg covered by garments (BE22-150 B/026/005).

179 E. g. Sidebotham et al. 2022, pls. 24. 25.

180 OGIS 674 l. 16; Bernand 1984: 199–208 no. 67 l. 15.

181 Ast – Bagnall 2016, 57 no. 267 color pl. 2; for seasonality at Koptos and Berenike, see also Rathbone 2002, 191 f.

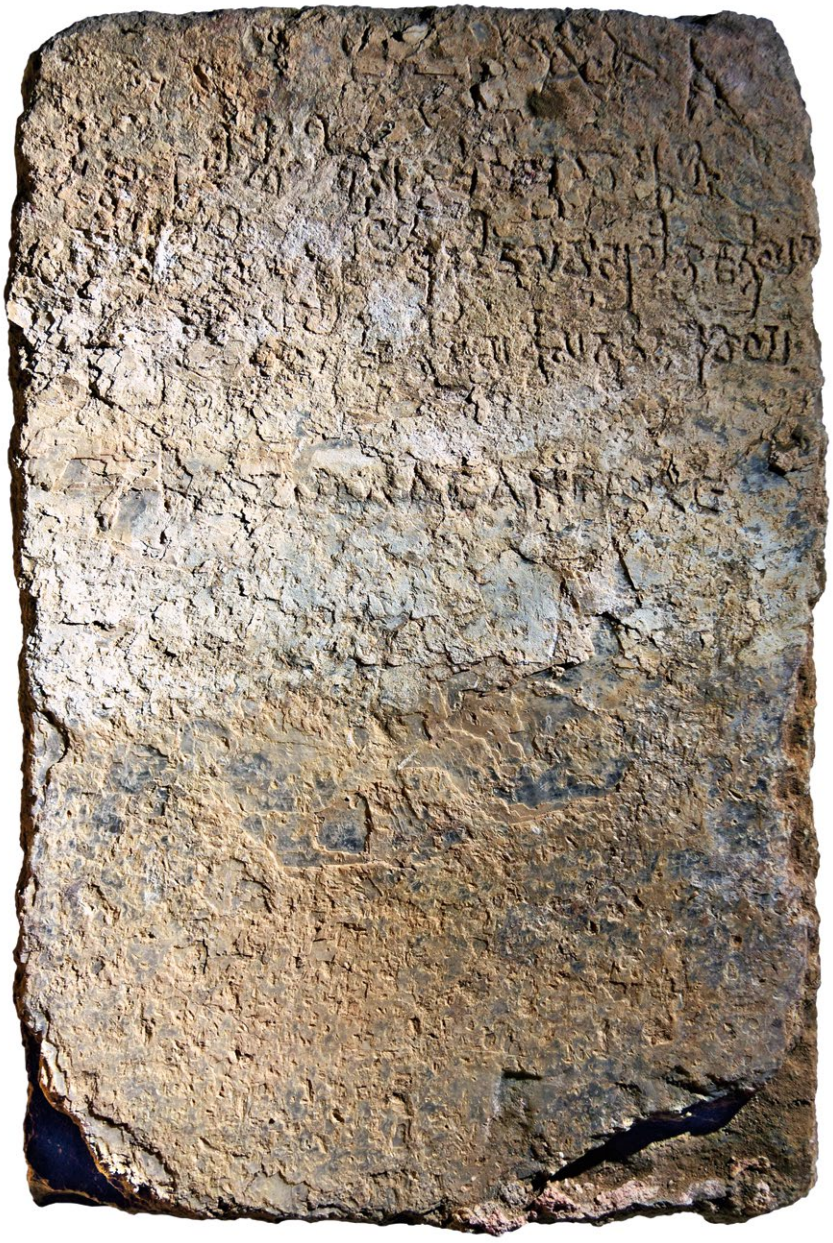


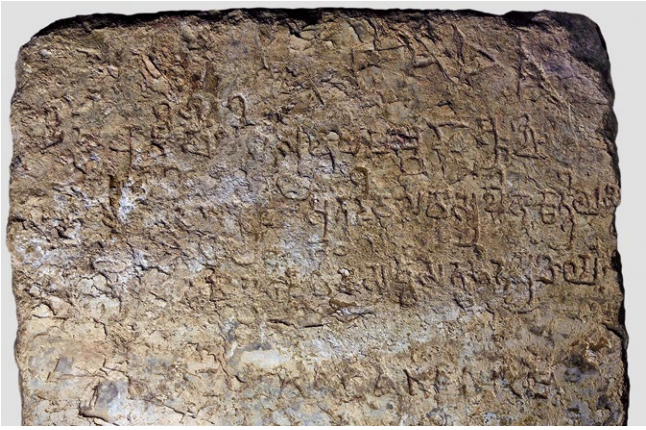
Fig. 49: Stele with Brahmi-Sanskrit and Greek inscription from Isis temple courtyard

49

some period of time, though the statue was created earlier than the stele. It is possible that the objects occupied a space in the temple courtyard where South Asian finds had accumulated (Fig. 4. 6).

92 Made of local anhydritic gypsum, the stele is 83 cm high × 55 cm wide × 17,5 cm thick. The writing surface measures 30,5 cm high, and there is a blank space of about 45 cm below it, which might originally have been decorated or inscribed with ink or paint, or simply served as a backdrop to a votive object placed in front of it.

93 Though largely intact, the stele is in poor condition with breakage visible around the edges. The most serious damage is to the surface of the stone, where extensive flaking, especially on the upper left side, has obliterated inscribed letters, most notably at the beginnings of lines 3–5. A blank 8 cm margin appears at the top of the stele, and another, 2,8 cm wide, on the left. The right side of the inscription survives, but there is no clear right margin, as the lettering at least in lines 3 and 4 extends all the way to the right edge of the stone.



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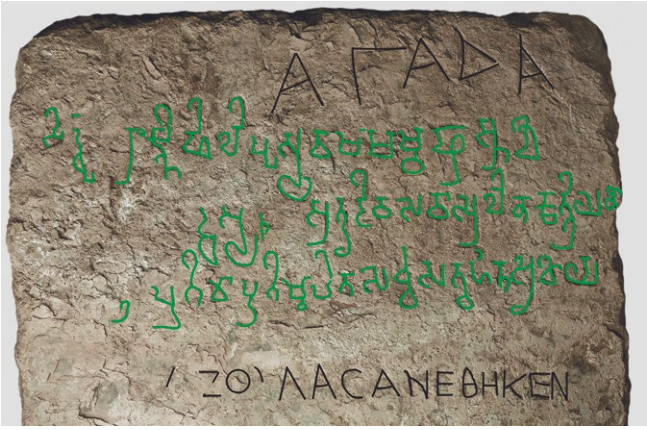

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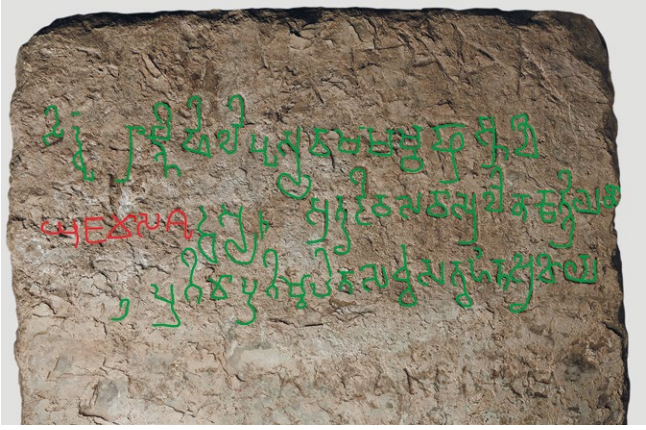


52

Fig. 50: Detail of Brahmi-Sanskrit and Greek inscription

Fig. 51: Indian stele with extant Brahmi script in green and Greek in black

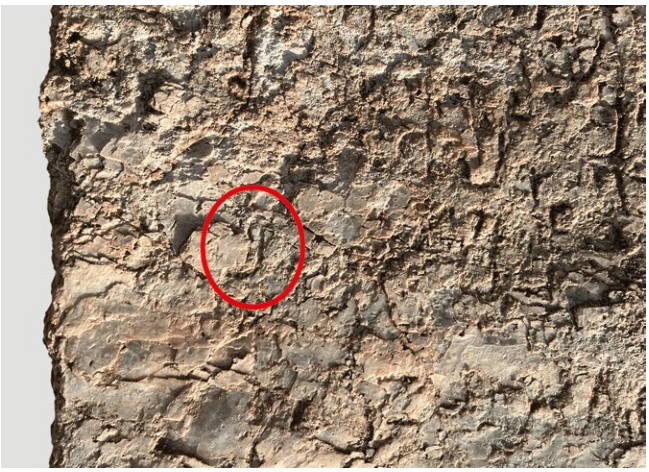
Fig. 52: Indian stele with tracing of Brahmi script (green is visible, red is reconstructed)

94 Three lines (ll. 2–4) are in Brahmi script, and two are in Greek (ll. 1 and 5) (Fig. 50. 51)[182]. The first, Greek line is carved in the upper margin in large clumsy letters. The person who cut it was probably not responsible for the Greek in line 5, which contains the donor's signature. Whether a single person carved both the Brahmi-Sanskrit text in lines 2–4 and the Greek in line 5 cannot be demonstrated. The depth and width of incisions of both the Brahmi and the Greek letters appear similar, but the Greek line does not follow the same general trajectory. It slopes downwards, while the Brahmi lines remain on even horizontal planes. These differences could be due to outside influences, such as the carver's weaker command of incising the Greek alphabet, rather than to the employment of two different stone cutters. In the text we do not identify a change of stone cutter in line 5, though the possibility remains that someone else carved that line.

95 What follows is a transcription of the entire inscription[183], accompanied by line notes, a translation of the text and a discussion of the individual parts and larger significance of the dedication. The hypothetical reconstruction of the missing parts of the Sanskrit text is given in the accompanying notes and illustrated in Fig. 52. 54. 55.

182 When our manuscript was still in print, S. Basu Majumdar published an article (Basu Majumdar 2024) offering an alternative interpretation to ours, especially as it relates to line 1 of the Sanskrit text. Hers is based on photographs available online and reproduced in the preliminary report Sidebotham et al. 2022, 20 f. with fig. 23, 2, but bears little relation to what is on the stone. Also, the author argues that the Greek lines belong to an earlier dedication and that the stone was reused for the Sanskrit inscription (p. 60), but there is absolutely no sign of such reuse, and the second Greek line clearly relates to the Sanskrit text.

183 The following conventions are followed for the Brahmi-Sanskrit lines: [ ] uncertain reading, ( ) editorial restoration of lost text, + lost *akṣara*, ? preserved but illegible *akṣara*.



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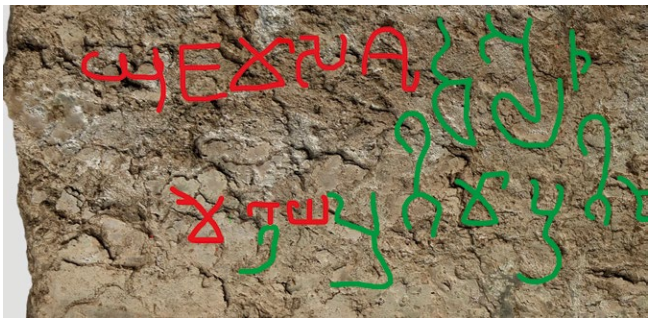


54

55

Fig. 53: Detail of beginning of line 4 of inscription

Fig. 54: Detail of reconstructed text (see Fig. 52) with the reading maitreyapratimā

Fig. 55: Detail of reconstructed text (see Fig. 52) with the reading śākyamūnipratimā

Reg. BE22-150/021/002	83 × 55 × 17,5 cm	A.D. 9 September 248
1	(Hd. 2) ΑΓΑΔΑ	
2	(Hd. 1) *si[ddhamṃ] rājño philippasya va(r)ṣe ṣaṣṭhe 6 āśva-*	
3	*+ + + + + ddhasya [5] atra divase vāsulena kṣattriyeṇa*	
4	*+ + ? + [prati]mā [pratiṣṭhāpitā] sarvvasatvahitasukhāya*	
5	[Οὐ]ᾳζοῠλας ἀνέθηκεν	

Line Notes:

1. The Greek letters ΑΓΑΔΑ inscribed in the upper margin are large and awkward. They do not form an integral part of the rest of the inscription but rather resemble graffiti. Although it is possible that something was carved before them, no further traces can be seen. We understand them as a possible attempt to render the Greek word ἀγαθά (see below § 96).
2. The first letters of the line are heavily damaged, although the reading is certain. It is not possible to trace clearly the shape of the final *-m*. No traces are visible of *akṣaras* after *āśva*. The small stroke on the right of the letter was not intentionally carved but is due to damage of the surface.
3. The beginning of the line can probably be reconstructed as *(yujamāsa-śu)ddhasya.* The figure 5 is almost indiscernible. The remaining parts of this sign make this reconstruction, however, highly probable.
4. Most of the stone's surface is completely peeled off in the beginning of line 4. Thorough inspection of the stone could identify the remains of one *akṣara* as the only surviving part of the original inscription. It is not possible to establish clearly their phonetic value. According to their shape, these remains could either represent the lower portion of a ligature in *-tr*.; alternatively, they could design the vowel sign *-ū* attached to a now lost consonant sign. It is impossible to establish a safe or at least probable reconstruction. For more discussion, cf. below § 108. For a close-up view of the surviving letter, see Fig. 53. Although only faintly visible, the reading of the rest of the line seems certain and was confirmed by inspection of the stone.

5. The name Οὐαζουλας (Ouazoulas/Vazulas) renders in Greek the Indian personal name Vāsula (*vāsulena*) carved in Brahmi in line 3 (Fig. 56). The high and low horizontal bars appearing just after the first A are the top and bottom of what is likely the Greek letter Z; visually, these bars would also fit Ξ, but Z seems a better phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit. Traces do not fit the letter Σ. The Θ and H in the word ἀνέθηκεν are narrow and compact, but the reading is certain.

56

57

Translation[184]:
(Hd. 2) (*Greek*) Good (fortune) (?). (Hd. 1) (*Sanskrit*) Success. In the sixth, 6th, year of king Philippa, (on) the 5th (day) of the bright (half of the month) Āśva(yuja), on this day the *kṣatriya* Vāsula had established an image of [...], for the benefit and pleasure of all beings. (*Greek*) Vazulas set it up.

Fig. 56: Tracing in black of Greek signature

Fig. 57: Tracing in black of Greek letters in line 1

Constituent Parts of the Inscription

96 The first line preserves the Greek letters ΑΓΑΔΑ, which do not appear to be part of the original design of the dedication (Fig. 57). We are tempted to associate them with the word ἀγαθά as an appeal for good fortune. This reading would entail the interchange of aspirated and voiced stops (θ > δ), with examples attested in Greek papyri[185]. The formula ἐπ᾽ ἀγαθῷ (»for the good!«) is common in dedications from Berenike (and elsewhere), and appeals for ἀγαθὴ τύχη (»good luck/success«) can be found in inscriptions throughout Egypt and the wider Mediterranean[186]. If ΑΓΑΔΑ is meant as »good (luck)«, it could be that the person who carved it was trying to render in Greek the first word of the Sanskrit: *siddham*, »success«.

97 The Indian part of the text is in the style of a Buddhist donative inscription containing the following elements: opening and date formula, donor, object of donation and concluding merit rewarding phrase. Remarkably, the recipient of the donation – usually the universal community (*cāturdiśa-saṃgha*) or a specific monastic community – is not indicated.

98 The Greek part of the inscription (l. 5) gives the name of the donor and briefly refers to the dedicatory act, the phrasing of which (NN ἀνέθηκεν) is typical of Greek dedications.

Script and Language

99 The Indian text is composed in nearly correct Sanskrit. Its orthography corresponds to contemporary Indian inscriptions composed in Sanskrit, including the redundant anusvāra (*ṃ*) in *siddhaṃm* and doubling of consonants before or after *r*, especially in the cluster *tr*- (written as *ttr*-)[187].

100 The genitive *rājño* (instead of *rājñaḥ*) seems to be the only reminiscence of Middle Indic phonology. Given these features, the text represents a rather developed variety of the so-called ›Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit‹ typical of inscriptions of the later Western Kshatrapas (second–fourth centuries A.D.)[188]. In particular, the concluding da-

184 The language translated, whether Greek or Sanskrit, is indicated in parentheses.
185 Gignac 1976, 96 f.
186 Such expressions are so common that they do not warrant being illustrated with specific examples.
187 Damsteegt 1978, 22.
188 Salomon 1998, 82.

tive – *sukhāya* instead of (hybrid) *sukhāye* – distinguishes the language clearly from the Sanskrit used in the northern Kushan inscriptions. This attribution is also confirmed by the script, which has to be related to the variety of Brahmi used in western India during the second to fourth centuries A.D. The slightly prolonged and curved verticals of *rā*, *a* and *le*, the shape of the *khā* with a prominent triangular base, and the *ya* with a curled left arm put this script close to the ›Early Gujarati Western Brahmi‹[189] used under the later Western Kshatrapas in present day Gujarat. The script of the Berenike inscription is close to the style of the Mewasa inscription of ›Bhadidama‹ (for Bhartṛdāman, the name of a Western Kshatrapa ruler) dated to Saka Era 203 (= A.D. 281)[190]. The slightly narrow lettering and use of occasional ornamental flourishes in the lower part of compound characters and for the vowel signs and the forms of some letters like *sa*, *pa* and *va* are especially comparable.

The Opening Date Formula

101 As usual for inscriptions from the beginning of the Common Era, the text is introduced by *siddham*, »success«. The following date formula contains the regnal year of the emperor (*rājan*) Philippa (Latin Philippus, Greek Φίλιππος), the lunar month, the lunar fortnight, and the day. It concludes with the phrase *atra divase* »on this day«. This structure confirms the western Indian origin of the author and can be compared with Prakrit and Sanskrit inscriptions of the Western Kshatrapas. In particular, the use of *varṣa* (instead of *saṃvatsara*, which is more common in the Kushan and Satavahana records), the indication of the fortnight in the genitive case, and the indication of the lunar month (instead of the season) appear in Western Kshatrapa records. It is worth comparing, for example, the dating formula in the Andhau Yaṣṭi inscriptions, dated (Saka) 52 (= A.D. 130/131): *rājño cāṣṭanasa ysamotikaputrasa rājño rudradāmasa jayadāmaputrasa varṣe dvipaṃcāśe 50 2 phaguṇabahulasa dvitiya vā 2*, »In the year fifty-two – 52 –, on the second – 2 – day of the dark (fortnight of month) Phālguna (during the reign) of king Cāṣṭana, son of Ysāmotika (Zāmotika) (and) king Rudradāman, son of Jayadāman.«[191]

102 The concluding phrase *atra divase* is not typical for western inscriptions. In fact, it rarely appears in Brahmi inscriptions of the first centuries A.D., which usually conclude the dating formula with *etasyāṃ pūrvāyāṃ* or a variant. The earliest attestations of this phrase belong to the northwest of the subcontinent. Several early Kharosthi inscriptions conclude their date with *atra divase* (e. g. CKI 147, Kanishka year 11 = A.D. 138, CKI 156: *atra divasakale*, [Kanishka] year 40 = A.D. 167), perhaps based on the earlier *iśa divasami* (e. g. CKI 405, [Azes] 73 = A.D. 26/27)[192].

103 That this usage continued in the northwest is shown by several later occurrences of the formula. A recently published biscript record of the Paratarāja Datayola dated in the 16th year of his rule (late third century A.D.) concludes the dating formula with *atra divase* »on this day« in both its Kharosthi and its Brahmi part[193]. The center of Paratarāja rule was the Loralai area in Baluchistan, but the territory they ruled at least temporarily encompassed »southern Arachosia including the Kandahar area and the Helmand river valley, the area around Panjgur, and an area stretching eastwards towards the Indus river«[194].

189 For a description of this script type, see Strauch 2012, 300–308.

190 Mirashi 1981, 143–148 no. 61 pl. 30.

191 Cited after Mirashi 1981, 118 no. 46 (editorial signs are omitted), see also nos. 47–49.

192 More common in the northwest is the formula *iśa kṣuṇami*, which was used throughout the first century A.D. up to the third/fourth century (e. g. CKI 564, Azes year 131 = A.D. 74; CKI 153, (Kanishka) year 20 = A.D. 147), etc.

193 Falk 2020/2021, 134–137.

194 Tandon 2012, 45.

104 The same formula also appears in later Brahmi records from the northwest: the fifth-century Nārāyaṇa bronze figure from the Kashmir Smats in northwest Pakistan[195] and the fifth-century copper scroll of the Alchon Huns[196]. There is a similar related formula (*asmin divase*) from outside the northwestern territories in the so-called Dalpat-ki-Khirki Mohalla inscription from the Mathura area, dated year (1)14 of Kanishka (A.D. 240/241)[197].

105 The overall picture suggests that this formula was characteristic of the epigraphic traditions of the northwest, where it is repeatedly attested in inscriptions from various periods. From there, it occasionally found its way into the epigraphic traditions of other regions, including Mathura and Gujarat. Given the overall influence of northwestern culture on the territories under Western Kshatrapa rule, the use of an apparently northwestern formula in the Indian inscription from Berenike is not surprising.

106 The sixth regnal year of the Roman emperor Philip (the Arab) fell in Egypt between September 248 and August 249[198]. It corresponded to the Indian Saka years 170 or 171, which usually started with the beginning of the lunar month Caitra (March–April); the reconstructed date – 5th day of the bright fortnight of Āśvayuja – thus corresponded either to September 9th, 248 (Saka 170) or to August 31st, 249 (Saka 171)[199]. Since, in Egypt, the latter date would have marked the beginning of Philip's seventh regnal year[200], the inscription can probably be dated to September 9th, 248, corresponding to the 12th of the Egyptian month Thoth, with some reservation due to the uncertain reading of the number 5. That Philip's son, who ruled as co-Augustus from summer 247 until the fall of 249[201], is not referenced in the dating clause is exceptional for documents from Egypt[202]. Presumably, the foreign donor or whoever was responsible for the Sanskrit text was unfamiliar with the practice of referring to both *Augusti*.

The Donor

107 An Indian named Vāsula (Vazulas in Greek) is the dedicant. He identifies himself as a *kṣatriya*, or belonging to the »warrior class«, according to the Indian *varṇa* system. Such an identification is somewhat unusual but may be explained by the foreign context of the donation. The participation of *kṣatriya*s in Indian Ocean trade activities is well attested by inscriptions from Hoq Cave on Socotra Island where the personal names indicate the *kṣatriya* background of most of the visitors[203]. The personal name Vāsula relates to the deity Vāsu or Vāsudeva and most likely represents a hypocoristic form of a name beginning with Vāsu[204]. Accordingly, the personal name points to the Vishnuite background of the donor's family. This does not contradict his activity as a lay Buddhist donor.

The Object of Donation

108 The highly damaged, yet discernible, portion of the fourth line *...[prati]mā [pratiṣṭhāpitā]* reports the erection of a cult image (*pratimā*). The few surviving traces

195 Srinivasan – Sander 1997, 113; Falk 2004, 6–8.

196 Melzer – Sander 2006, 266 l. 33, written as *atra vivase*.

197 Cf. Srinivasan – Sander 1997, 114 f.; edited by Lüders 1961, 116–119 § 81. For the dating of this record in the rule of Kanishka II, see van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949, 302.

198 *Pace* Basu Majumdar 2024, 59.

199 Calculated with the Pancanga program (version 3.14), accessible under the URL https://www.cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp/~yanom/pancanga/.

200 Philip the Arab died early (i. e., September–October) in his seventh regnal year; see Kienast et al. 2017, 190.

201 Kienast et al. 2017, 192.

202 See, e. g., the following papyri, which date to the sixth year of the Philippi: Schubart 1942, 26 no. 18 l. 3; Vitelli 1906, 42 no. 19 ll. 20–22; Weinstein 1971, 70 no. 2854 ll. 33–35.

203 Strauch 2012, 358–360.

204 For comparable hypocoristic formations in the Hoq corpus, cf. Strauch 2012, 353.

of the letters that precede this passage are too fragmentary to allow a reliable reconstruction. In fact, two variants can be discussed. Either the remains represent *tr*., or they are intended for *-ū*. In the first case, a reconstruction as *maitreyapratimā* »image of (future Buddha) Maitreya« seems tempting, but the space between *tr*. and *pratimā* does not seem sufficient for a rather broad *ya*. Moreover, such a reconstruction would lead to a rather late beginning of line 3 and would require at least two additional letters, such as *iyaṃ* »this«. The second option seems to fit better: Here, the reconstruction *śākyamūnipratimā* »image of (Buddha) Śākyamuni« (with an incorrect *mūni* for *muni*) could be considered. However, both variants are rather hypothetical, and we prefer not to consider either of them in the reconstruction and translation of the inscription. An illustration of the two hypothetical reconstructions can be found in Fig. 54 and 55. Alternative readings such as *buddhasya pratimā* »image of the Buddha« or *bhagavataḥ pratimā* »image of the Lord« can be excluded.

109 The character of the marble statue cannot really help to settle this question. It is uncertain whether the inscription refers to the Buddha statue found in its immediate vicinity. If this were the case, an attribution to Śākyamuni seems completely plausible. However, a connection to Maitreya cannot be entirely ruled out. Maitreya would have been depicted here as a Buddha and not as a Bodhisattva with ornaments and his characteristic attribute, a flask in his left hand. A recent study points out that no images of Maitreya in his status as a Buddha have yet been identified, although he is often depicted in Buddhist texts in his capacity as future Buddha. However, »even if Maitreya existed among extant Buddha images, it would be impossible to identify them [sic] by appearance alone«[205]. It is, therefore, equally possible that the Berenike inscription refers to Buddha Maitreya and that it relates to the marble Buddha statue found nearby. On the other hand, both objects date from different periods and it cannot be excluded that the Isis temple once contained other, not preserved, Buddhist images.

110 The short formula (including the concluding merit rewarding phrase) can be compared to a partially preserved inscription from Ahicchattra that reads: *maitreyapratimā pratiṣṭhāpitā sarvvasa(ttvahitasukhāya)*[206].

Concluding Merit Rewarding Formula

111 The concluding formula »for the benefit and pleasure of all beings« frequently appears in contemporary Buddhist donative inscriptions, among them also Western Kshatrapa inscriptions from western India. For example, it occurs as *sarvvasatvānāṃ hitasukhārtham iti* in the Gunda inscription of Rudrasiṃha I dated Saka 103 (= A.D. 181)[207], and as *sarvasatvahitasukhārtham* in the Rajkot inscription of Vijayasena, dated Saka 162 (= A.D. 240)[208]. The dates of these inscriptions – and the Mewasa inscription mentioned above – neatly bracket the Berenike inscription.

General Discussion

112 The Berenike stele is the first inscription in Sanskrit ever found in Egypt. It is also the only inscription in Sanskrit known so far that references a Roman emperor. However, it is not the only artifact from Egypt that witnesses an Indian language. Thus, it should be evaluated against the background of this additional evidence.

205 Rhi 2023, 22.

206 Rosenfield 1967, 231 briefly discusses the inscription on the pedestal of a statue that shows Maitreya as Bodhisattva, with a flask in his left hand, dating both inscription and statue on stylistic grounds to the mid-second century A.D. The text is read on the basis of the image accessible online: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/budhisattva-maitreya-unknown/PQHqK23ZNIzq6w?hl=en (23.04.2023).

207 Mirashi 1981, 130 f. no. 52.

208 Mirashi 1981, 142 f. no. 60.

113 An ostrakon written in Prakrit displayed in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, is said to have come from Myos Hormos. R. Salomon identified it as an inventory of foodstuffs (oil, meat and wine) referring to (at least) three individuals: Hālaka, Viṇhudata (= Viṣṇudatta), and Nākada (= Nāgadatta?), likely Indian merchants residing at the port in the second or third century A.D.[209]. The script indicates the southern background of the scribe (Deccan). Given the widespread practice in the Eastern Desert of using ostraka as a writing medium[210], it is likely that the scribe recorded the list at the Red Sea port. In other words, the ostrakon was not an ›export item‹ from India[211].

114 In total, four fragmentary jar inscriptions in the ›Tamil‹ variant of the Brahmi script survive from Myos Hormos and Berenike. Two first-century A.D. sherds from Myos Hormos preserve the Tamil personal names Kaṇaṉ and Cātaṉ[212]. A third graffito from Myos Hormos, written twice on the rim of an Indian storage jar, is more difficult to interpret but also likely records a personal name[213]. A fourth Tamil-Brahmi inscription, on a sherd from a broken Dressel 2–4 amphora found at Berenike, dates to the first century A.D. and contains, according to I. Mahadevan, the phrase »Koṟṟaṉ, the chieftain«[214].

115 Two other potsherds, supposedly with Tamil-Brahmi graffiti, have been documented from Sumhuram (Khor Rori) in the Dhofar region of Oman. In one case, however, the presentation and discussion leave much doubt about the actual character of the graffito and its linguistic background[215]. The second sherd from Sumhuram – with reference to the well-attested Tamil personal name Kiraṉ/Kīraṉ – is beyond doubt and adds to the repertoire of Tamil-Brahmi graffiti known from the western Indian Ocean and the Red Sea[216]. The detailed survey of Tamil-Brahmi graffiti on pottery presented by Mahadevan outlines the reach of this script in South India and throughout the wider Indian Ocean[217].

116 In form and content, the Berenike Sanskrit inscription relates closely to inscriptions from Gujarat under the rule of the later Western Kshatrapas. This connection can be seen in the context of other epigraphic finds, particularly those from Hoq Cave[218]. Between the first and fifth centuries A.D., Indian visitors left nearly 200 inscriptions inside the cave. Almost all Brahmi epigraphs are in a western variant of this script, which points to Gujarat as the likely origin of the writers[219]. Moreover, several inscriptions explicitly refer to Bharukaccha and Hastakavapra, well-known trading centers and urban settlements situated on either side of the coast of the Gulf of Cambay, at

209 Salomon 1991, 731–736; Salomon 1993. It should be noted that Myos Hormos is thought by some to have been abandoned by the third century, see Nappo 2020.

210 For an introduction to the writing culture of the Eastern Desert, see Cuvigny 2003. Eastern Desert ostraka have been published in a number of corpora (in addition to articles appearing in journals and collected volumes); see, e. g., for Berenike: Bagnall et al. 2000; Bagnall et al. 2005; Ast – Bagnall 2016; Ast et al. 2022; for Didymoi: Cuvigny et al. 2012; for Krokodilo: Cuvigny 2005; Bülow-Jacobsen et al. 2019; for Mons Claudianus: Bingen et al. 1992; Bingen et al. 1997; Cuvigny 2000; Bülow-Jacobsen 2009; for Xeron Pelagos: Cuvigny 2022. In June 2023, I. Strauch located the ostrakon in the same gallery of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (gallery 29 2nd floor) as Salomon reported it to be. We are unaware of any ceramic study identifying the fabric of the sherd.

211 This is the conclusion also of Salomon 1991, 733.

212 Illustrations of the Myos Hormos jar inscriptions are in Whitcomb – Johnson 1979, 87 pl. 27 j; Whitcomb – Johnson 1982, 259 pl. 61. I. Mahadevan (in: Whitcomb – Johnson 1982, 263 f.) first dated the Myos Hormos inscriptions to the first or second century A.D. but then revised the date to the first century (see Mahadevan 1996 and Salomon 1991).

213 Tomber et al. 2011, 8 f. fig. 2, 6.

214 Mahadevan 1996; Sidebotham 2011, 75. The reading of the first part seems very doubtful. While the available photograph of the inscription clearly confirms *pūmāṉ*, the two initial *akṣaras* are too damaged to allow a safe reading. They could also represent a symbol, like the sign at the end of the text.

215 Bukharin 2002, 39 f.

216 Pavan 2016, 6 fig. 7.

217 Mahadevan 2020, 38–46.

218 Strauch 2012.

219 Strauch 2012, 341 f.

its broad end[220]. These references provide further epigraphic evidence for commercial links between Gujarat and the western Indian Ocean. In addition, many of the Hoq visitors were Buddhists, as their names suggest. The presence of short devotional texts dedicated to Buddha Gautama and two drawings of *stūpa*s might point to ritual activity in Hoq Cave by these visitors[221].

117 A most remarkable feature of the Berenike stele is that it was fashioned and inscribed locally in Berenike. This is the strongest evidence seen to date for the presence in the Red Sea region not of ›Indians‹ *per se* but of those having particular skill sets, such as knowledge of the Sanskrit language and Brahmi script and the ability to engrave them on stone. Moreover, this inscription and the accompanying Buddhist images are the first material evidence for practicing Buddhists in the Roman world[222]. The archaeological context of the inscription does not indicate a monastic background of the donation. It seems that local Buddhists used an existing sacred site for their ritual purposes and erected there Buddha images to satisfy their own religious needs. In this respect, the new evidence clearly points to the existence of Buddhist religious devotional practices. Yet, it cannot serve as evidence for the formal institutionalization of Buddhism through the creation of monasteries.

The Indian Dedications in Context: Self-Representation, Devotion, and Gratitude Amidst Perilous Sea Travel

by Rodney Ast – Marianne Bergmann

Fig. 58: Gypsum statuette of the god Poseidon/Neptune from room abutting southern exterior wall of the Isis temple

58

118 The marble statuette and the Brahmi-Sanskrit inscription once stood close to one another in the courtyard of the Isis temple, the usual location for dedications in Egyptian precincts. The stele with the Vrishni triad and the Buddha head made in the local workshop found in the annex outside of the temple were probably also originally dedications in the temple. The presence *in situ* of many statue bases shows that large-scale dedications proliferated over time along the walls of the temple courtyard, with small ones probably squeezed in between (Fig. 4).

119 In these surroundings, the dedicants of the Buddha statuettes and Sanskrit stele manifested their devotion to Buddha, who had begun to be worshipped through images by the first or second century A.D. By dedicating images of Buddha in a temple of Isis, they adopted a Greco-Roman and Egyptian practice of offering in any temple images of any god including foreign deities. But the Isis temple courtyard served more than as an arena for religious devotion. It was also a space where individuals, through their benefaction, showcased their commercial enterprises at a vital transshipment hub, while others displayed their indebtedness to the officials and rulers on whom they felt dependent[223]. The Buddhist dedications must have participated in this as much as the offerings made

220 Cf. for a discussion of these references Strauch 2012, 344 f.

221 See Strauch 2012, 259 f. for Buddhist devotional texts; 355–358 for Buddhist names; 363 for Buddhist drawings. Strauch 2019 discusses the implications of this evidence for our understanding of the spread of Buddhism in the West.

222 For an overview of the then available – often disputed – material and literary evidence for Buddhists in the western world, see Strauch 2019.

223 This is apparent in the honorary dedications made on behalf of others; examples are found in Ast – Bagnall 2015; Ast 2021.

by and on behalf Roman traders and officials, such as the dedication set up by the scribe of the aromatics storehouse for his superior, a tax receiver named Gaius Julius Faustinus[224]. These donations were very public acts that highlighted, even celebrated, the networks supporting and enabling the profit-seeking businesses that benefited from Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade. And even if the Buddha figures were not as large as some of the other dedications, they were not to be overlooked because of (probable) gilding, use of expensive stone materials and, in some cases, employment of high-quality craftsmanship. Moreover, given their exotic nature, they undoubtedly stood out among the other offerings.

120 There were also possible apotropaic functions for the Buddha images. Since the Ptolemaic period, Isis had become a guardian of the seas, ships, and seafarers, and in the Mediterranean a ceremony associated with her signaled the opening of the sailing season (*ploiaphesia*, *navigium Isidis*) each spring[225]. There may have been analogous attitudes and ceremonies for those voyaging in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. Accordingly, dedications in the Isis temple offer thanks or appeals for safe journeys and protection from shipwreck[226]; several of them appeal for the welfare of the sailors (ὑπὲρ τῶν πλοιζομένων)[227]. For this same purpose, someone probably dedicated the statuette (made of local anhydritic gypsum) of the god Poseidon/Neptune found in the late antique deposit adjacent to the temple (Fig. 58)[228], which reproduces the same statue-type as a Poseidon/Neptune at Eleusis that rests his foot on a dolphin (Fig. 59)[229]. Another traveler must have sought protection by taking a bronze statuette of this god with him to India, which ended up in the abovementioned famous bronze hoard near Kolhapur in the southwestern Deccan[230].

121 Dedications of Buddha images might have served similar functions. In later centuries, Buddhists appealed to a special *Bodhisattva* (*Avalokiteśvara*) for help in desperate situations[231]. One could, however, always invoke Buddha himself for protection against maritime dangers, as seen in an early medallion from the stone railing added in the late second century B.C. or later to the Bharhut *stūpa* in central India (Fig. 60)[232]. According to the accompanying inscription, it represents a much-repeated story: a ship full of merchants comes close to a gigantic fish, which swallows all the water and what is in it. In vain, all the gods are invoked until finally someone proposes to shout, »honor be to Buddha«. Hearing these cries, the fish understands that in a world with Buddha he must not kill other beings. The fish then releases the water and the ship. In some versions of the story the fish even remembers that he was a monk in a

59

Fig. 59: Poseidon/Neptune with foot on a dolphin. Eleusis, Archaeological Museum

224 Ast – Bagnall 2015, 174–176. 178–183.

225 Bricault 2020, 23–42 (Ptolemaic period); 203–229 (*Ploiaphesia*, *Navigium Isidis*).

226 Many of these inscriptions are still under study.

227 Ast 2021.

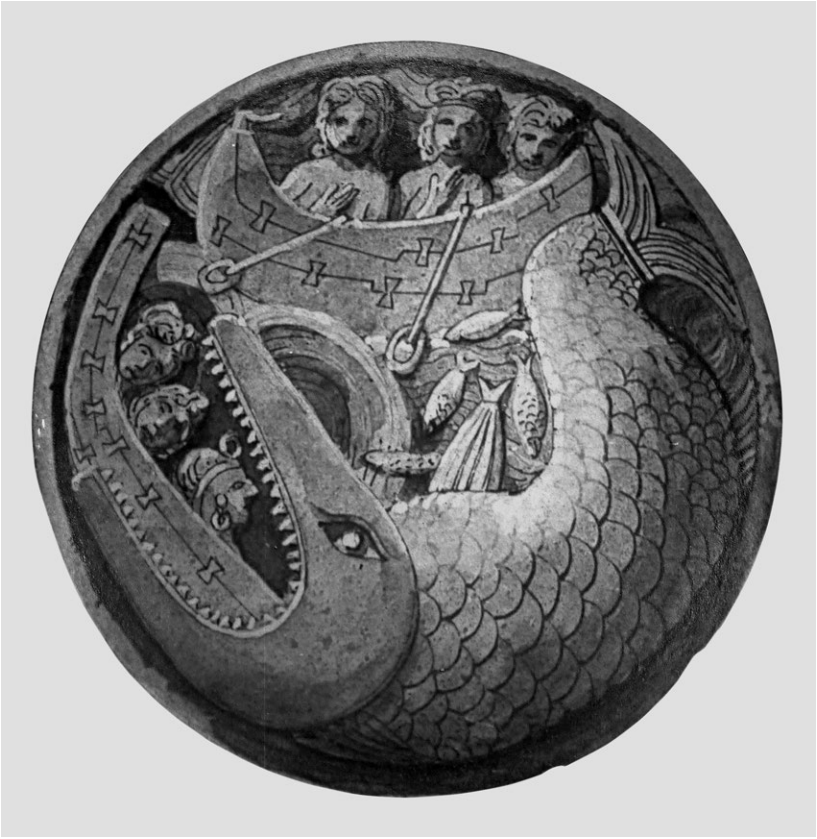
228 BE19-126/016/002. Sidebotham et al. 2020, 21 pl. 24, 6.

229 Eleusis: Klöckner 1997, 215 cat. ES 1; for the ›type Eleusis‹: Klöckner 1997, 61–71. 215–221 figs. 18–28; for the identification with Poseidon see also a cameo at Naples that represents the confrontation of Poseidon and Athena over the ownership of Attica: Klöckner 1997, 216 cat. EF 3 fig. 22; Gasparri 1994, 140 no. 28 color fig. 81; cf. Bartman 1992, 103 (modern?). It is a subtype of the famous Hellenistic type of Poseidon (see ›Lateran-type‹ next note).

230 De Puma 1991, 82–86 fig. 5, 1–3; Klöckner 1997, 200 LB 2 with lit.; Bartman 1992, 135 cat. 15; for the ›Lateran type‹: Vorster 1993, 68–74 no. 27 figs. 125–132; Klöckner 1997, 20–60 figs. 1–3; cf. above § 43.

231 Bechert et al. 2000, 259–265. See also Bopearachchi 2014.

232 Cunningham 1879, pl. 34, 2; Lüders 1963, 155–158 no. B 62 pls. 21. 43. For a summary of recent discussion, which tends to date the railing to the first century A.D., see Lo Muzio 2018, 132 f.



60

Fig. 60: Bharhut stūpa in northern/central India, drawing of relief tondo from stone railing

former life[233]. From this perspective, the Buddha images in the Isis temple might also be seen as parallels to the statuette of Poseidon/Neptune also dedicated in the temple.

Conclusion: Giving Local Expression to Foreign Beliefs and Practices

122 Apart from the terracotta warrior, which was probably imported from India, the artifacts discussed here are Indian objects in the sense that they represent revered Indian beings (Vrishni heroes and Buddha), and the inscription preserves an Indian-style devotional text in Brahmi script and familiar formulas. Three of the objects, however, were certainly made in local Berenike stone; a fourth might have been, while a fifth was carved in Mediterranean marble imported to Egypt. Thus, even in the case of foreign materials, the sculptors responsible for crafting the dedications likely worked in Berenike, which shows that Indians stayed for extended periods at the port. As local products made on commission, the artifacts also reveal a remarkable variety of intercultural exchange: the Vrishni heroes appear in the image field of a typical architecturally designed stele from provincial Roman Egypt. The Buddhist Sanskrit inscription inserts a date by a Roman emperor into a traditional dating formula, while also adding in Greek a clause that succinctly acknowledges the dedicant. The two Buddha statuettes follow Gandharan models but introduce the lotus plant as a visualization of Indian verbal metaphors, at the same time translating the style of execution of the figures into that of other ›idioms‹, one perfectly Greco-Roman and the other quite possibly Palmyrene.

123 Setting aside the two stelai, which would not have been convenient to take to Berenike because of their sheer bulk, one might ask why travelers did not bring a statuette of Buddha of Gandharan workmanship to the port in one of the ships that transported tons of costly and even fragile materials there. This cannot easily be answered, but it was not unique to the Indians. Other members of the mixed society at Berenike also acted this way. For example, people from the kingdom of Meroe (north of Khartoum, Sudan) dedicated a life-sized statue of their god Sebiumeker alongside Isis outside the entrance to the Isis temple in Berenike, a position typical for such dedications in Meroitic temples. Understandably, these large statues were made in the local Berenike stone, possibly by a Meroitic sculptor. But, as has been shown by O. Kaper, traits of Sebiumeker were purposefully mixed with those of his Egyptian pendant Osiris[234].

233 For the gradual amalgamation of this story with the similar one around the monk Pūrṇa, who by his force of meditation saved his merchant brothers on a ship from a storm brought up against them by a demon, see Lüders 1963, 157 and the illustration of this story in Ajanta Cave no. 79 (II, 10,3); Schlingloff 2000, 444–451, esp. 448 no. 6.

234 Kaper 2021.

124 A similar phenomenon is observed in the case of an inscribed stele from the so-called Palmyrene shrine in Berenike[235]. Written in Palmyrene Aramaic and Greek, it commemorates the dedication by an artisan (τεχνίτης) named Berichei of a statue of Yarhibol. Bilingual dedications of this type are common in Palmyra, even if the Aramaic part is usually more extensive[236]. Yet, what is remarkable about the Berenike inscription is the unusual Greek spelling of Yarhibol's name as Ἱεροβωλ (»the holy Baal«), a coinage that one could perhaps even interpret as a false etymology, as the expected form of the name in Greek is Ἰαριβωλ[237]. One doubts whether the person responsible for the inscription was very accustomed to translating Palmyrene Aramaic to Greek. Whatever the exact circumstances behind the making of the inscription, the stele represents a further instance of a foreign model being transferred to local material in a way that strays from conventions in the model's homeland.

125 Much of the discourse about the material culture of Indo-Roman trade has focused on objects »that sailed away«[238]. Some of the heterogenous elements of foreign dedications, such as the Indian, Meroitic and Palmyrene, might have been at least partly born of local necessity, but others were probably a hybrid expression produced by the transcultural society of the port. Observed from this perspective, it is perhaps more fitting to say not that foreign relics had sailed away from home, but that the inspiration behind them had sailed away, only to be realized in a transcultural setting by agents operating with a mix of ideas, habits, models and styles.

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235 SEG 49, 2117 (TM 143263); Dijkstra – Verhoogt 1999, 207–218.

236 Among the many bilingual inscriptions from Palmyra, cf. Yon 2012, 256 f. (no. 305), an honorary inscription on a column set up in A.D. 139 for two men, Bareichei and Mochimos. For reflection on possible motivations behind language choice in Palmyrene inscriptions, see Bonesho 2022.

237 Greek inscriptions from Palmyra consistently have Ιαριβωλου in the genitive: Yon 2012, 61–63 no. 53 (A.D. 248/249); 211 f. no. 223 (A.D. 193); 259–261 no. 307 (A.D. 198); 284 f. no. 343 (A.D. 162); 285 no. 344 (A.D. 162). Note, however, Ἰεραβλος in an inscription from Koptos: Bernand 1984, 238–240 no. 85 (A.D. 216); and the similarly spelled personal name Ἰεραβολη in Berenike (Bagnall et al. 2000, 65 no. 97, cf. pp. 3 and 27), which the editors suggest was a female name, but is probably the male Ἰεραβολης (the long horizontal stroke after eta likely the top of sigma), not uncommon in inscriptions from Palmyra (cf. the list in Yon 2012, 433). The Koptos inscription and the Berenike ostrakon suggest that Greek Ἰεραβλ-/Ιεραβολ- was established in the Red Sea area.

238 This is exemplified by a recent seminar entitled »Indian Ocean Figures that Sailed Away« at NYU's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World; see https://isaw.nyu.edu/research/io-figures (20.03.2023).

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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Title Page: Julia Lougovaya and Rodney Ast
Fig. 1: Szymon Popławski
Fig. 2: Szymon Popławski
Fig. 3: Szymon Popławski
Fig. 4: Szymon Popławski
Fig. 5: Steven E. Sidebotham
Fig. 6: Compilation by Mariana Castro
Fig. 7: Elke Fuchs
Fig. 8: Photo by Dr. Suresh Vasant/good resolution copy: (C) Regents of the University of Michigan, Department of the History of Art, Visual Resources Collections
Fig. 9: Kamila Braulińska
Fig. 10: Kamila Braulińska
Fig. 11: Photos courtesy Shivlee Collection, USA
Fig. 12: Photos courtesy private collection in the Netherlands
Fig. 13: left: Elke Fuchs and Marianne Bergmann – middle and right: Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 14: after: I. Kurita, Gandharan Art I. The Buddha's Life Story, rev. ed. (Tokyo 2003) Fig. 226; by permission of I. Kurita
Fig. 15: Elke Fuchs and Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 16: Steven E. Sidebotham
Fig. 17: Elke Fuchs and Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 18: Elke Fuchs und Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 19: 3D scans and photogrammetric reconstruction: Orthogonal views of 3D model combining Buddha's body and head created using photogrammetric techniques, based on photos by Szymon Popławski and Steven E. Sidebotham
Fig. 20: Left, middle and right: Elke Fuchs and Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 21: Left, middle and right: Elke Fuchs and Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 22: Left and right: Steven E. Sidebotham
Fig. 23: Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 24: Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 25: Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 26: British Museum Images_ III_1_00092880001_h
Fig. 27: Oxford, Ashmolean Museum RS10631_ EA_OS-18a-hpr
Fig. 28: Oxford, Ashmolean Museum RS592719_ EA_OS_26-aaa-hpr
Fig. 29: after: I. Kurita, Gandharan Art I. The Buddha's Life Story, rev. ed. (Tokyo 2003) fig. 226; by permission of I. Kurita
Fig. 30: Photo: courtesy Hirayama Ikuo Silk Road Museum, Yamanashi, Japan
Fig. 31: Elke Fuchs and Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 32: Oxford, Ashmolean Museum RS592719_ EA_OS_26-aaa-hpr
Fig. 33: Elke Fuchs and Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 34: Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 35: Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 36: Elke Fuchs and Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 37: Steven E. Sidebotham
Fig. 38: after: I. Kurita, Gandharan Art II. The World of the Buddha (Tokyo 1990) fig. 237; by permission of I. Kurita
Fig. 39: after: W. Weber, Die ägyptisch-griechischen Terrakotten, Königliche Museen zu Berlin. Mitteilungen aus der ägyptischen Sammlung 2 (Berlin 1914) pl. 21 no. 213
Fig. 40: after: D. Faccenna, Sculptures from the Sacred Area of Butkara I (Swat, W. Pakistan). Plates I–CCCXXXV (Rome 1962) pl. CXCI
Fig. 41: Julia Lougovaya and Rodney Ast
Fig. 42: Forschungsarchiv für Antike Plastik, Fitt 67-75-1, arachne.dainst.org/entity/165327 (photo: Gisela Fittschen-Badura)
Fig. 43: Photo: courtesy John Pollini, Los Angeles
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Fig. 45: Photo: courtesy Christian Luczanits, in: Western Himalaya Archive, University of Vienna no. CL 00_14
Fig. 46: Photo: courtesy Christian Luczanits, in: Western Himalaya Archive, University of Vienna no. CL 00_12
Fig. 47: Elke Fuchs and Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 48: Photo: courtesy Rubina Raja/ Palmyra Portrait Project, Ingholt Archive at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, PS no. 789
Fig. 49: Kamila Braulińska
Fig. 50: Kamila Braulińska
Fig. 51: Kamila Braulińska; tracing: Rodney Ast and Ingo Strauch
Fig. 52: Kamila Braulińska; tracing: Ingo Strauch
Fig. 53: Ingo Strauch
Fig. 54: Ingo Strauch
Fig. 55: Ingo Strauch
Fig. 56: Kamila Braulińska; tracing: Rodney Ast
Fig. 57: Kamila Braulińska; tracing: Rodney Ast
Fig. 58: Marianne Bergmann
Fig. 59: Photo: courtesy Hans Rupprecht Goette, Berlin
Fig. 60: after: A.Cunningham, The Stûpa of Bharhut: A Buddhist Monument Ornamented with Numerous Sculptures Illustrative of Buddhist Legend and History in the Third Century B.C. (London 1879) pl. 34, 2

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